

CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY

Elena Doldor

Examining Political Will, Political Skill and their Maturation
among Male and Female Managers

School of Management

PhD

Academic Year: 2010 - 2011

Supervisors: Prof Susan Vinnicombe
Dr Deirdre Anderson

August 2011

CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

PhD Thesis

Academic Year 2010 - 2011

ELENA DOLDOR

Examining Political Will, Political Skill and their Maturation
among Male and Female Managers

Supervisors: Prof Susan Vinnicombe
Dr Deirdre Anderson

August 2011

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores engagement in organizational politics among managers. There is increasing recognition that organizational politics are ubiquitous in organizational life and critically important in managerial roles. Drawing on micro perspectives in extant literature on organizational politics, this research attempts to better understand managerial engagement in politics by focusing not only on managers' ability to engage in politics, but also on their willingness to do so. As such, the research examines *what* managerial political will and political skill entail, as well as *how* political will and skill develop. In doing so, special consideration is paid to gender, an aspect largely ignored in extant research on organizational politics. Adopting a qualitative exploratory approach, the empirical study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 38 managers (20 women and 18 men) in two global companies.

The thesis makes four key theoretical contributions. First, it conceptualizes and identifies three dimensions political will, a previously neglected factor pertaining to managerial political engagement. Second, the study reconciles and refines the dimensionality of political skill, as related to existing models in field. Third, the thesis introduces a novel developmental perspective on political will and skill, proposing an initial model of political maturation. This model outlines three stages of political maturation by mapping out developmental patterns in managers' political will and skill. The model also identifies triggers of political maturation. Finally, the thesis unpacks the role of gender in managers' political will, skill and their maturation, demonstrating the importance of making gender visible and voiced when investigating managers' engagement in organizational politics. In articulating these contributions, the study thoroughly accounts for the impact of organizational context on the political will, skill and maturation journey of male and female managers.

Keywords:

organizational politics, political skill, political will, political maturation, development, gender, female managers

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing up of this thesis marks the end of an exciting and arduous journey. As this journey comes to an end, I would like to take the time and thank those who have made it possible. My thanks go, first of all, to my supervisors, whose insightful guidance and constant support have given me the freedom needed, as well as a compass during this intellectual quest. To Val Singh, who set me on the doctoral path in my first year, nurturing my curiosity in the field of organizational politics. To Sue, who magically turned the most intricate decisions of my PhD into simple, manageable steps and saw the light at the end of the tunnel, even when I did not! And to Deirdre, who knew how to be demanding and supportive at the same time, seeing me through the darkest moments of the journey – thank you for being an incredible friend, mentor and supervisor altogether.

I was fortunate enough to receive guidance from a number of other people in Cranfield. Many thanks to the members of my PhD panel – David Buchanan, Colin Pilbeam, and John Towriss – for giving me feedback throughout the years, as my work progressed through many stages, and occasionally took some detours. I am equally grateful to David Denyer, for always asking the tough questions and for his generous advice about research, and about the mysteries of academic life more broadly. Besides this academic support, my life in Cranfield was made simpler by Wendy Habgood, who helped me navigate the doctoral process and by Alison Southgate, who was always there to answer my queries. I thank both of them.

The support of several friends and colleagues has made the PhD experience more bearable and, in many ways, more interesting. I would like to thank Andrey Pavlov, Linda Florio, Marko Bastl and Doyin Atewologun for their frequent advice and valuable insights, for commiserating and for sharing some good laughs too, as we all went through our PhD journeys. A special thanks to Andrey, whose friendship and intellectual companionship helped me make sense of the PhD experience, with its often puzzling highs and lows. Other

friends, although less engrossed in the reality of the PhD process itself, have simply been by my side throughout the years, bringing me a dose of (in)sanity – for this, I am particularly grateful to Carmen Juravle and Silvia Rossi.

Finally, I would like to thank a handful of people without whom this PhD journey would not have started, nor finished. My former boss in France, Benedicte Henry Canudas, gave me a much needed push a few years ago, by encouraging me to apply for a PhD in Cranfield in the first place. I am grateful for her advice and for believing in me at that time. Special thanks go to my partner Femi, who has made this last challenging year of my thesis wonderful in so many ways. His loving patience took many forms, from simply putting up with my PhD tantrums and encouraging me all throughout, to more concrete help in wrapping up this thesis, by proof reading my chapters and crafting the visuals. Finally, my family has always been a source of strength for me - particularly my kind grandparents and my mum. I am indebted to my mother for the relentless efforts and sacrifices she made for my education, for her unconditional love and for always believing that I can achieve things that sometimes felt out of reach. Above all, I am thankful to her for showing me what resilience and optimism mean.

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Aurelia, with all my love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
1 INTRODUCTION.....	3
1.1 Aim of the research.....	3
1.1.1 Personal interest.....	3
1.1.2 Research problem.....	4
1.2 Structure of the thesis.....	7
2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
2.1 Introduction.....	13
2.2 Organizations as political entities.....	14
2.2.1 Rational and political theories of organizations.....	14
2.2.2 Power.....	16
2.2.3 Power and politics.....	18
2.3 Organizational politics and the individual.....	22
2.3.1 Politics in managerial roles.....	23
2.3.2 Perceptions of organizational politics.....	25
2.3.2.1 Evaluative perceptions of politics.....	26
2.3.2.2 Perceived degree of workplace politicization.....	29
2.3.3 Antecedents of political behaviours.....	31
2.3.3.1 Structural antecedents.....	31
2.3.3.2 Individual antecedents.....	32
2.3.4 Political behaviours.....	35
2.3.4.1 Outcomes of political behaviours.....	37
2.3.5 Political skill.....	39
2.3.6 Gender, power and organizational politics.....	43
2.3.6.1 Gender and organizational politics.....	43
2.3.6.2 Gender and power in organizations.....	46
2.4 Conclusion and scope of inquiry.....	50
3 METHODOLOGY.....	59
3.1 Introduction.....	59
3.2 Philosophical approach.....	59
3.2.1 From positivism to interpretivism.....	60
3.2.2 Critical realism.....	62
3.2.2.1 Critical realism and methodological choices.....	65
3.2.3 Philosophical stances in the field of organizational politics.....	67
3.3 Research design: A case for qualitative approach.....	71
3.3.1 Methodological fit.....	71
3.3.2 Variance versus process.....	73
3.3.3 Context.....	73
3.4 Fieldwork.....	74
3.4.1 Organizations and participants.....	74
3.4.2 Data collection.....	78
3.5 Data analysis.....	80

3.5.1 Template analysis: from categorizing to interpreting data	80
3.5.2 The use of NVivo	85
3.5.3 Criteria for qualitative research	86
3.6 Summary	87
4 FINDINGS	91
4.1 Introduction	91
4.2 Individual definitions of politics	99
4.2.1 Summary	104
4.3 Politics within organizational context	105
4.3.1 Organizational context and politics within Bevcorp	105
4.3.2 Organizational context and politics within Semcom	107
4.3.3 Summary	110
4.4 Political will	111
4.4.1 Functional dimension	113
4.4.2 Ethical dimension	119
4.4.3 Emotional dimension	123
4.4.4 Summary	128
4.5 Political skill	130
4.5.1 Political awareness	131
4.5.2 Developing relationships and networks	135
4.5.3 Creating alignment	137
4.5.4 Versatile influence	141
4.5.5 Authenticity	143
4.5.6 Summary	148
4.6 Maturation of political will and skill	148
4.6.1 Stage one: Naiveté and discovery	159
4.6.2 Stage two: Coping and endurance	166
4.6.3 Stage three: Leveraging and proficiency	175
4.6.4 Summary	189
4.7 Triggers of political maturation	191
4.7.1 Managerial role demands	192
4.7.2 Critical political experiences	194
4.7.3 Mentors and role models	200
4.7.4 Summary	206
5 DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION	211
5.1 Introduction	211
5.2 Summary of findings	212
5.3 Conceptualizing political will	215
5.3.1 Limitations of dispositional approaches	216
5.3.2 A non-dispositional perspective on political will	217
5.3.3 Dimensions of political will	219
5.3.4 Summary	226
5.4 Refining the concept of political skill	227
5.4.1 Dimensions of political skill	228
5.4.2 Summary	232
5.5 Toward a model of political maturation	234
5.5.1 Introducing a developmental perspective on political will and skill	237

5.5.2 Overview of developmental patterns: stages and triggers of political maturation	239
5.5.3 Summary	251
5.6 Unpacking the role of gender in organizational politics	254
5.6.1 Political will and skill from a gender perspective	255
5.6.2 The maturation journey from a gender perspective	261
5.6.3 The critical role of context	263
5.6.4 Summary	265
5.7 Contribution to knowledge from a critical realist perspective	267
5.7.1 Generative mechanisms and explanatory claims	267
5.7.2 Individual meanings and analytical abstraction	269
5.7.3 Process perspective	270
5.7.4 Context	270
5.7.5 Reflexivity	271
5.8 Summary	273
6 CONCLUSIONS	277
6.1 Introduction	277
6.2 Research problem	277
6.3 Overview of the study and its contribution	278
6.4 Implications for practice	283
6.5 Limitations	285
6.6 Directions for future research	286
6.7 Personal learning	289
REFERENCES	291
APPENDICES	311
Appendix A - Interview protocol	311
Appendix B – Dissemination of doctoral research	312

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4-1 Overview of findings.....	92
Figure 4-2 Overview of the data analysis process.....	94
Figure 4-3 Overview of findings: Political will.....	112
Figure 4-4 Overview of findings: Political skill.....	130
Figure 4-5 Overview of findings: Stages of political maturation.....	149
Figure 4-6 Overview of findings: Triggers of political maturation.....	192
Figure 5-1 Copy of Figure 1-1: Overview of findings	213
Figure 5-2 A model of political maturation	236

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1 Definitions of Organizational Politics	21
Table 3-1 Contrasting philosophical perspectives in social science	61
Table 3-2 Key tenets of Critical Realism	63
Table 3-3 Methodological fit in field research	72
Table 3-4 Sample break-down by gender	76
Table 3-5 Sample break-down by seniority	77
Table 3-6 Sample break-down by gender and seniority	77
Table 3-7 Summary of methodological considerations.....	87
Table 4-1 Key individual meanings of 'organizational politics'	99
Table 4-2 Politics within organizational context.....	110
Table 4-3 Dimensions of political will.....	113
Table 4-4 Dimensions of political skill.....	131
Table 4-5 Stages and dimensions of political maturation	151
Table 4-6 Participants per maturation stage and seniority	155
Table 4-7 Highlights of Stage 1: Naiveté and Discovery	166
Table 4-8 Highlights of Stage 2: Coping and Endurance.....	174
Table 4-9 Highlights of Stage 3: Leveraging and Proficiency	188
Table 4-10 Triggers of political maturation	207
Table 5-1 Summary of theoretical contributions	273

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research topic addressed in this thesis and provides an overview of the thesis document. Section 1.1 explains the aims of the research, by describing the personal interest that underpinned the PhD, and by broadly positioning the research problem within relevant academic literature. In addition, section 1.2 provides a summary of the thesis by outlining the structure of each chapter.

1.1 Aim of the research

This research aims to explore managerial engagement in organizational politics, from a gender perspective. In doing so, it focuses on the key concepts of political will and political skill. Based on a qualitative study, this thesis provides greater insight into the nature of political will and skill among male and female managers. In addition, the thesis charts the development of political will and skill, by proposing a model of political maturation. Below I explain the development of the research interest that underpinned this doctoral study.

1.1.1 Personal interest

Throughout my university studies, I had an enduring interest in gender and power in the workplace. While completing my Masters degree in Organizational Psychology in France, I examined career obstacles for women in male-typed jobs (science and engineering). This entailed six months of full-time employment in a multinational company, with the main purpose of better understanding and addressing potential gender-related obstacles among its staff. This experience confronted me with a range of subtle yet complex gender differences in how male and female employees approached their jobs and careers. What struck me most was that the key behavioural differences which appeared to matter career-wise were largely related to how male and female employees handled informal aspects of the workplace. While the default answer about career progression was a focus on technical competence and scientific credentials, I also took notice of gender differences and biases in how

employees conveyed their credentials and aspirations by using self-promotion and impression management, by building relationships and influencing upwards. All these informal processes conveyed 'unofficial rules of the game' which seemed to put female employees at a disadvantage. Proposing HR policies and interventions meant to address these informal obstacles was challenging and somewhat paradoxical, since it required formalizing the informal dimension of the workplace, or at least surfacing it and bringing it into the conversation.

Intrigued by this experience, and wanting to gain a deeper understanding into these elusive influence processes obstructing women's progress in organizations, I applied for a PhD in Cranfield's International Centre for Women Leaders. My PhD proposal was about the use of impression management among male and female leaders. Oddly enough, at that time, I did not have a word to capture the myriad of phenomena that interested me, given that the term 'organizational politics' does not exist as such in my mother tongue, Romanian, or in French! After embarking on the doctoral programme, I began reading more broadly and discovered a body of research around organizational politics - a concept entirely new to me - which closely captured my research interests. This incorporated the issue of impression management, but had a broader scope, thus integrating the areas of interest and the issues I had tackled before. Given that I was particularly interested in the lack of women at top organizational levels, I worked toward better articulating my research interests by reading about organizational politics as related to managerial roles, and from a gender perspective. This enabled me to formulate the research problem in a more meaningful way, by building on previous academic work in the field.

1.1.2 Research problem

Organizations are increasingly prone to become political arenas due to changes in the business landscape: increased value placed on team work and people skills, fast-paced organizational change, blurring organizational boundaries and

flattened hierarchical structures. Therefore, successfully managing organizational politics is nowadays a crucial part of managerial roles and a source of power in the workplace. While managerial work has been traditionally understood by focusing mostly on formal aspects of power and authority, a number of commentators have drawn attention to the political dimension of management and leadership (Block, 1987; Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter and Ferris, 2002; Hall, Blass, Ferris and Massengale, 2004; Hartley and Branicki, 2006). In effect, Butcher and Clarke (2006, p. 297) argued that:

‘...management is essentially all about the reconciliation of competing causes and therefore managers are, *de facto*, politicians by the nature of their role.’

Indeed, research in the field of organizational politics offers several insights into how managers deal with politics, by outlining a wide repertoire of political behaviours (see Buchanan and Badham, 2007 for a review) and by pointing out the criticality of political skill in managerial roles (Douglas and Ammeter, 2004; Semadar, Robins and Ferris, 2006). While these streams of research inform us about what managers actually do when engaging in politics, they provide insufficient insight into what drives managers to engage in politics. Therefore, in reviewing the literature, I observed a relative neglect of the precursors of managerial engagement in politics. I turned my attention to the vaguely defined concept of political will (Mintzberg, 1983), wanting to better understand what makes some managers more willing to engage in organizational politics than others. This appeared to be a promising line of investigation not only in providing additional insight into managerial political action in general, but in better understanding managerial political action from a gender perspective.

A surprising feature of current academic work on organizational politics is that it largely ignores the issue of gender. My interest in organizational politics had been sparked by my concern for women managers, yet I soon realized that the literature on organizational politics per se had little to offer in this respect. The scant research on this topic provides limited insight into how female managers deal with organizational politics, suggesting either a political distaste or a lack of

political skills among women (Arroba and James, 1980; Mainiero, 1994; Perrewe and Nelson, 2004). In light of other readings strictly concerned with politics, I began to wonder - are women less willing and/or less able to engage in organizational politics? It appeared evident that more research was called for in order to address these questions and to better grasp gender differences in managerial engagement in politics. Given the prevalence of organizational politics in managerial roles and the enduring gender gap at top organizational echelons worldwide (Sealy, Doldor and Vinnicombe, 2009), this research angle may illuminate some of the obstacles encountered by women on their way to the top.

Finally, I found that most studies concerned with managerial engagement in politics in general, or from a gender perspective, approached the issue from a rather static perspective. The inevitable questions emerging were: Are some individuals intrinsically more able or more willing to engage in organizational politics? How do managers learn to handle politics? Is willingness to engage in politics something that can be developed? Mainiero (1994) suggested that key to the success of female executives is their political seasoning and maturation. However, it remains unclear what this maturation entails and if it is different for male managers.

As a result of these gaps and shortcomings in the literature, I formulated the following research questions, designed to bring additional insight into managerial political engagement, from a gender perspective.

RQ1: What attitudes toward organizational politics and engagement in politics comprise political will for male and female managers?

RQ2: What does skilled political engagement entail for male and female managers?

RQ3: How do political will and skill develop for male and female managers?

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured in six major chapters. Aside from this introductory chapter, the structure of the remaining chapters is as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature regarding organizational politics. The chapter sets off by examining macro perspectives of power and politics, thereby defining politics as an organizational phenomenon. I then turn my attention to micro perspectives in the field, examining organizational politics from the perspective of the individual. The importance of politics in managerial roles is discussed. Furthermore, the chapter reviews evidence on how individuals perceive organizational politics, how they engage in it and what drives or shapes individual political action, particularly among managers. The scant research on gender and politics is also reviewed. At the end of the chapter, I outline how a number of shortcomings in extant literature limit our understanding of managerial political action, formulating my research questions accordingly. These shortcomings and research questions essentially relate to political will – as a precursor of political engagement - , political skill – as a competent way of engaging in politics- and their development. I also explain why these aspects require further investigation from a gender perspective.

Chapter 3 explains how I designed and conducted the empirical study meant to address the research questions formulated. The chapter begins by clarifying the critical realist philosophical perspective underpinning the research strategy. The rationale for choosing an exploratory qualitative methodology is then explained. Further on, I provide details about the sample used (participants and their respective organizations) and describe the fieldwork carried out. Semi-structured interviews were used as a method of data collection, in order to explore managers' willingness and ability to engage in politics, while inquiring about developmental changes. The chapter also includes a detailed account of the data analysis process, which adopted a template analysis approach, supported by NVivo software.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. In order to set the scene for the main findings, the chapter begins by describing managers' individual meanings of 'organizational politics' and by depicting the nature of the political landscapes in their respective organizational settings. I then present the findings pertaining to political will, by outlining three attitudinal dimensions which convey managerial political will: functional, ethical and emotional. I proceed to presenting the five dimensions of political skill identified through the data analysis: awareness, building relationships and networks, creating alignment, versatile influence and authenticity. I then examine political will and skill in conjuncture and from a developmental perspective, describing three stages of political maturation: Naiveté and discovery, Coping and endurance, and Leveraging and proficiency. The chapter ends by discussing several triggers of this maturation, namely critical political experiences, managerial role demands and mentors and role models.

In Chapter 5 I provide a theoretically-informed discussion of the findings and articulate the contribution made by the current study to the literature on organizational politics. Four theoretical contributions are discussed. The first contribution lies in developing the poorly defined concept of political will, by proposing a novel conceptualization and dimensionality. The second one consists in refining the concept of political skill, in light of prior models in the field. The third contribution offered by this thesis stems from the novel developmental perspective on political will and skill. Specifically, I propose a model of political maturation, which integrates the stages and the triggers pertaining to the development of these two dimensions. Finally, the fourth contribution of the study consists in elucidating why gender is important in understanding managerial political will and skill, by highlighting gender-related obstacles in managers' political maturation journey. These are discussed in relation to the organizational context.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis, by restating the research problem tackled and by providing an overview of the study conducted and of its contributions. In addition, this chapter stresses the practical implications of the findings. The

limitations of the current study are acknowledged and directions for future research are suggested. In the end, I comment briefly on the personal learning gained during the PhD.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines scholarly work on the topic of organizational politics. Approaches to politics can be broadly classified into macro-perspectives and micro-perspectives (Vigoda, 2003; Buchanan, 2008). Macro-perspectives tackle organizational politics at the level of the organization by examining the interplay between power and politics. This focus on structural factors and organizations as political systems is particularly common among scholars in the fields of general management and organizational theory. In contrast, micro-perspectives tackle organizational politics at the individual level by examining reactions, behaviours, skills and interpersonal dynamics related to politics. Extant research focusing on individuals' experience with politics can be mostly conscribed to the field of organizational behaviour, and occasionally psychology. The current thesis adopts a micro-perspective and explores managers' willingness and ability to engage in politics, with a particular emphasis on gender. For this purpose, it also draws on literature in the field of gender in management.

In this chapter, I start by locating the notion of organizational politics from a macro perspective, described in section 2.2. This section compares rational and political organizational models, analyzes the conceptual links between power and politics and defines politics as an organizational phenomenon. In section 2.3, I turn my attention to micro-perspectives on organizational politics and review extant research into how individuals perceive and engage in politics, with a particular emphasis on male and female managers. I conclude this chapter in section 2.4, by outlining the research gaps identified in the literature and by formulating the research questions addressed by the doctoral study, in light of the reviewed literature.

2.2 Organizations as political entities

Power is one of the most central and contentious concepts in organizational studies. While there is an abundance of scholarly work on the topic, two distinct perspectives on power are relevant for the research issue tackled in this thesis: a rationalist, managerialist perspective and a political, pluralistic one. This section will discuss these two perspectives and unpack the notion of power, clarifying the link to organizational politics.

2.2.1 Rational and political theories of organizations

The intellectual roots of the first perspective can be traced back as early as Weber's work on bureaucracy. Striving to capture the changing nature of organizations at the turn of the 20th century, Weber (1947) proposed an 'ideal bureaucracy' model which he saw to be the most efficient and rational way of running organizations. The defining aspect of Weber's ideal bureaucracy is an emphasis on centralizing, formal/written rules and regulations, clearly defined roles and hierarchy, specialization and technical competence, meritocracy, and impersonality. Bureaucracies are thus underpinned by rational principles, striving relentlessly toward efficiency. Weber also concerned himself with the notions of power and authority, defining the former as 'the probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his [sic] will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests' (Weber, 1947; p. 152). Authority, in turn, was understood as taking three forms: charismatic (stemming from idealized individual characteristics), traditional (stemming from custom and tradition), and rational-legal (stemming from impersonal rules and laws). In Weber's view, power is legitimate to the extent that it relies on the use of rational-legal authority.

Inspired by these classic Weberian ideas, rational organizational models equate power with authority, which is meant to guide organizational actions towards the attainment of consensually pursued goals. The source of this legitimate power is the formal organizational design and any type of power beyond authority is either ignored or deemed illegitimate and disruptive (Buchanan and Huczynski,

2004, p.693). Along with that, there is an implied assumption of unity amongst employees, who are expected to pursue consensually-agreed goals in a rational manner.

Behavioural theories of the firm have challenged many of these assumptions, starting with Simon's (1957) seminal work on bounded rationality. Simon noticed that real decision-makers in organizations rarely possess exhaustive knowledge about the available alternatives and their consequences. Apart from these cognitive limitations, he also pointed out limitations related to social factors, highlighting the existence of conflicting preferences that decision-makers have with respect to the alternatives pursued. Disagreement over goals and means inevitably exposes the decision-making process to power and politics. This laid the foundation for a new perspective on organizations.

Taking a more realistic view on organizational life, political theories of organizations have legitimized, or at least acknowledged, the existence of differing individual or group interests and the influence processes engaged to defend them (Buchanan and Badham, 1999). In contrast to the implied unity of the rational mindset, organizations begun to be increasingly seen as political systems within which interdependent individuals and groups must find solutions to reconcile their divergent interests (Zaleznik, 1970; Mintzberg, 1985). In fact, Butcher and Clarke (2002) argued that organizational politics constitute the 'cornerstone for organizational democracy' by allowing the expression of multiple individual and group goals. Negotiating these conflicting interests entails influence attempts that may or may not rely on formal authority. From this perspective, power is not only the privilege of those entitled by hierarchical status or formal policies to exert it, but it is prevalent in the form of more or less obvious influence attempts made at all organizational levels. Authority remains a source of power but reduces nevertheless the cost of exercising power because it is legitimized, expected and accepted, (Hatch, 1997, p. 282; Pfeffer, 1981, p. 4). Other non-authorized forms of power require expenditure of personal resources (i.e. personal attention, expertise) and entail greater risks (Hatch, 1997, p. 284). Political theories of organizations do not overlook the

importance of authority, but are rather concerned with unpacking additional forms of power which may exist in organizations.

2.2.2 Power

Conceptualizations of power have traditionally drawn on Dahl's classic definition of the concept: 'A has power over B to the extent that he [*sic*] can get B to do something that he would not otherwise do' (Dahl, 1957, p. 202). Emphasizing the issue of resistance, Pfeffer (1981) defined power as one person's ability to influence the behaviour of another or to overcome resistance in achieving the desired outcomes. In attempting to unpack the notion of power beyond authority, three perspectives have been identified as relevant (Kakabadse and Parker, 1984; Buchanan and Badham, 2008, p. 48): power as a property of individuals, power as a relational phenomenon and power as a property of structures. Power has been often conceived as an individual attribute or a consequence of certain traits or skills that social actors possess. Examining the sources of individual power, Pfeffer (1992) distinguished between structural sources (formal position and role in the organization, access to information and other resources, importance of one's activity in the organization, ability to develop alliances) and personal sources (sensitivity, social intelligence, energy, toughness, ability to understand others). This analysis encapsulates the notion of authority by mapping out structural sources of power, but transcends it at the same time, by referring to the personal ones.

A second perspective conceptualizes power as a relational phenomenon by taking into account not only the agent, but also the target of the power relationship. Thus, power depends simultaneously on the agent's ability to influence and on the target's resistance to that influence (Bacharach and Lawler, 1981). French and Raven (1959) have developed a classic taxonomy of power bases which brought to the forefront the importance of others' perceptions and desires in exerting power, thus conveying a relational view of power. The authors have identified five types of power: legitimate (position held in organization), referent (ability to persuade), expert (skills and abilities), reward (ability to give rewards to others) and coercive power (ability to trigger

negative outcomes in other individuals' lives). Other authors (Yukl and Falbe, 1990, 1991; Yukl and Tracey, 1992) have distinguished between upward, downward and lateral influence attempts, underscoring the notion that power and influence are not necessarily constricted by someone's hierarchical position. While recognizing the role of structural factors in obtaining and deploying power, Pettigrew and McNulty (1995, p. 851) conclude that power is a relational phenomenon to the extent that 'power is generated, maintained and lost in the context of relationships with others'.

Going beyond individuals and interpersonal dynamics, a third perspective on power regards it as an embedded property of structures. Lukes (1974) analyzed several faces of power according to their visibility, ranging from overt or visible to covert or institutionalized power. Visible power can be linked to observable behaviour and is exercised by addressing specific issues through decision-making. More conspicuous ways of exerting power are simply not making decisions or keeping specific issues on or off the decision-making agenda, thus silencing and delegitimizing the needs and interests of certain individuals and groups (Pettigrew, 1973; Clegg, 1989). Critiquing Dahl's take on power, Bacharach and Baratz (1962, p. 948) drew attention to these 'two faces of power':

'Of course power is exercised when A participates in the making of decisions that affect B. But power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A. To the extent that A succeeds in doing this, B is prevented, for all practical purposes, from bringing to the fore any issues that might in their resolution be seriously detrimental to A's set of preferences.'

Post-modern theories of power have particularly explored the importance of invisible norms and discursive practices as essential power mechanisms (Foucault, 1975). For Foucault, power is inherent to institutions themselves rather than dependent upon the individuals who constitute these institutions.

Using the Panopticon metaphor, Foucault evinced the pervasiveness of power by revealing how norms become internalized and shape the very way we define what is normal and desirable, leading to taken-for-granted organizational and social practices.

These three perspectives on power alert us to some key characteristics of power, relevant to understanding the nature of organizational politics. First, individual power surpasses by far sheer authority. Second, power needs to be understood in a relational context. Third, power is often inconspicuous and intangible, and does not necessarily require enforcement or visible deployment. Fourth, the issue of interests is central to understanding of power dynamics, to the extent that interests shape individual pursuits, relational dynamics and broader processes and structures. The rational and political perspectives on organizations outlined in this section differ in their assumptions about the nature of interests pursued and the nature of the power employed to pursue them. The rational perspective is defined by an assumption of unity of purpose and a view of power as authority-based. The political perspective sees conflicting interests as inherent and legitimate, and considers power and influence attempts to be pervasive and, to some degree, covert or even embedded. In doing so, the political model captures and explains more accurately the richness of organizational life, where decisions are driven not merely by formal processes, but also by a myriad of interests, conflicts, and alliances composing the 'informal organization' (Feldman, 1988). It is this last perspective that is relevant for the current study.

2.2.3 Power and politics

Explaining the relationship between power and politics, Pfeffer (1992, p. 30) defined power as 'the ability to influence behavior, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things that they would not otherwise do', while politics are 'the processes, the actions, the behaviors through which this potential power is utilized and realized'. Similarly, Buchanan and Badham (2007, p. 10) posited that power is 'the ability to get people to do what you want them to do' and politics are 'power into action, using a range of

techniques and tactics'. Gray (in Kakabadse and Parker, 1984) stated that politics represent a deliberate attempt to change the balance of power in organizations. In other words, a common distinction between power and politics suggests that power is a latent capacity, while politics constitute power into action.

'Politics' is a term generally describing the management of social groups and the decision-making processes involved in it. 'Organizational politics' specifically refers to the existence of multiple competing interests within the organization and the influence processes enacted to manage them. As a form of power, politics are quintessentially relational (Vredenburg and Maurer, 1984). Due to their alleged illegitimate nature, politics have been ignored for a long time by organizational scholars. Pfeffer (1981, 1992) argued that the rational mindset, coupled with an interest for the de-contextualized power holder, led to insufficient exploration of issues related to interpersonal influence in the workplace. He called for more attention to organizational politics, described as:

'the activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or dissensus about choices' (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 7).

At the present, after decades of research, lack of agreement over the definition of organizational politics persists, and is perhaps symptomatic of the complexity and the controversial nature of the phenomenon under study. Table 2-1 encapsulates some of the most common definitions of organizational politics used in the literature. A few recurrent themes convey however a shared understanding of the concept – although these themes themselves are fraught with disagreement among scholars.

First, explained in the sections above, politics are *influence attempts* chiefly defined by their *informal, un-prescribed* nature, typically transcending organizational design or explicit norms and role requirements (Drory and Romm, 1990). Secrecy, backstage manoeuvring and hidden agendas are aspects constantly associated with this manner of exerting power (Farrell and

Petersen, 1982; Buchanan, 1999). However, authors vary in the extent to which they consider the unofficial nature of politics as problematic. While some described influence attempts not sanctioned by the organization as illegitimate and dysfunctional (Mayes and Allen, 1977), others have argued that the ability to behave in a discretionary manner is the bedrock of empowering individuals (Block, 1987) and enabling the democratic expression of their interests in the organizational arena (Butcher and Clarke, 2002).

Second, politics are about *interests and agendas* in the workplace. Benjamin Franklin famously said: 'Politics is how interests and influence play out in an institution.' With regards to the nature of the interests pursued, a majority of management scholars have defined self-interest as the core driver of organizational politics (Burns, 1961; Frost and Hayes, 1977; Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick and Mayes, 1979; Porter, Allen and Angle, 1981; Ferris et al., 1989; Kacmar and Baron, 1999). Using this lens, Mintzberg (1985) described politics as synonymous with 'politicking', while Ferris and King (1991) portrayed the impact of political factors on organizational decision-making as 'a walk on the dark side'. Without overlooking the importance of self-interest, pluralistic perspectives of organizations increasingly view politics as the inevitable management of multiple, and potentially conflicting interests in the workplace (Crick, 1993, in Hartley and Branicki, 2006; Butcher and Clarke, 2002). In addition, certain authors (Buchanan, 1999; Buchanan and Badham, 2007, p. 11; Drory and Romm, 1990) pertinently argue that the issue of self-interest is not that straightforward. Firstly, self-interests are not necessarily opposed to organizational interests; they might even lead to the accomplishment of broader organizational goals (e.g. enhancing personal reputation increases leadership effectiveness). Secondly, self-serving motives are not exclusively specific to political behaviours; therefore one cannot solely differentiate between political behaviours and other social/organizational behaviours on the basis of this criterion.

Table 2-1 Definitions of Organizational Politics

Definitions of Organizational Politics	
	'Individual acts of influence to enhance or protect the self-interest of individuals or groups.' (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick and Mayes, 1979, p. 77)
	'The activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or dissensus about choices.' (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 7)
	'Individual or group behaviour that is informal, ostensibly parochial, typically divisive, and above all, in the technical sense, illegitimate – sanctioned neither by formal authority, accepted ideology, nor certified expertise.' (Mintzberg, 1983, p.172)
	'A process, that of influencing individuals and groups of people to your point of view, where you cannot rely on authority.' (Kakabadse, 1983, p. 34)
	'A social influence process in which behavior is strategically designed to maximize short-term or long-term self-interest, which is either consistent with or at the expense of others' interests.' (Ferris, Russ and Fandt, 1989, p. 145)
	'The reconciliation of different interests.' (Butcher and Clarke, 2003, p. 478)
	'Intra-organizational influence tactics used by organization members to promote self-interests or organizational goals in different ways.' (Vigoda, 2003, p. 31)
	'Power into action, using a range of techniques and tactics.' (Buchanan and Badham, 2007, p. 10)
	'Organizational politics refers to a broad range of activities associated with the use of influence tactics to improve personal or organizational interests.' (Rosen, Harris and Kacmar, 2009, p. 27)

Underpinning the need to reconcile various interests is the limited nature of organizational resources. The distribution of *resources* and advantages is thus a theme frequently mentioned in relation to politics (Pfeffer, 1981; Farrell and Petersen, 1982; Drory and Romm, 1990). Gandz and Murray (1980) distinguished between definitions of workplace politics that focus on the use of influence and power for resource allocation and those that focus on self-serving behaviours at the expense of others in the organization. The managers

interviewed in their study identified competition for resources as one of the most political issues in the workplace. Politics are also perceived to be more frequent at higher hierarchical levels, where the distribution of resources takes place (Zahra, 1985).

Overall, these definitions convey some common themes as well as some conflicting perspectives about organizational politics. Having defined organizational politics as an organizational phenomenon, I will now turn my attention to micro-perspectives on politics.

2.3 Organizational politics and the individual

While the overview of macro-approaches on organizational politics enabled me to broadly define the phenomenon under investigation, micro-approaches on organizational politics are instrumental in clarifying the level and scope of inquiry of the doctoral project. Having established the political nature of organizations, my core interest lay in understanding how male and female managers operate within these political entities. In this section I will thus examine scholarly work on organizational politics which focuses individuals' experience with politics. A myriad of empirical studies in the field of organizational politics, as well as several holistic models of political behaviour (Vredenburg and Maurer, 1984; Drory and Romm, 1990; Ferris, Fedor and King, 1984; Buchanan and Badham, 2007; Ammeter et al., 2002) pointed four major themes relevant for the research issue at hand: perceptions of organizational politics, antecedents of political behaviours, political behaviours, and political skill. Therefore, the literature review on micro perspectives in the field of politics is organized around these themes, with an added emphasis on managers and gender.

In section 2.3.1 I discuss the relevance of politics in managerial roles. Section 2.3.2 explores how individuals perceive organizational politics by focusing on two streams of literature: one that has mostly tried to ascertain beliefs about the nature of politics, and another one that has predominantly focused on the

perceived degree of politicization of the workplace. Section 2.3.3 is concerned with antecedents of political behaviour, essentially exploring evidence on what drives individuals to engage in organizational politics. Further on, section 2.3.4 examines how individuals actually engage in politics, by identifying a wide range of actual political behaviours. A distinction is made between simply engaging in politics, and doing so competently – in other words, between behaviour and actual skill. Therefore, section 2.3.5 reviews the available literature on political skill. Finally, section 2.2.6 explores the link between gender and organizational politics.

Many have deplored the fragmented nature of literature in the field (Bacharach and Lawler, 1998; Buchanan, 2008; Doldor and Singh, 2008). Indeed, micro perspectives of organizational politics share some of the definitional debates discussed in macro perspectives of power and politics. This results in researchers using an array of more or less congruent definitions and measures. Therefore, in reviewing the literature, the emphasis will be not only on the empirical results of various studies, but also on how key concepts related to politics have been conceptualized, investigated and/or operationalized.

2.3.1 Politics in managerial roles

Starting from the premise that organizations are political systems, Schein (1977) argued that ‘power struggles, alliance formation, strategic manoeuvring and ‘cut-throat’ actions may be as endemic to organizational life as planning, organizing, directing and controlling’ (p. 64). She called for more investigation into individual political behaviour in organizations. Changes in the contemporary business landscape make organizations increasingly prone to politics: blurred organizational boundaries, fast-paced organizational change, flattening of hierarchies, increased value placed on team work and on managing individual or group interests (Zanzi and O’Neill, 2001). Making similar observations about the changing nature of organizations, Kanter (1997, p. 59) commented on their implications for managerial work:

‘Managerial work is undergoing such enormous and rapid change that many managers are reinventing their profession as they go. With little precedent to guide them, they are watching hierarchy fade away and the clear distinctions of title, task, department, even corporation, blur. Faced with extraordinary levels of complexity and interdependency, they watch traditional sources of power erode and the old motivational tools lose their magic.’

Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that more recently scholars have increasingly focused on political behaviour in managerial and leadership roles. Indeed, there has been a persistent call for more politically aware and politically skilled managers (Ammeter et al., 2002; Hall et al., 2004; Hartley and Branicki, 2006). Ferris, Fedor and King (1994) claimed that the political dimension of managerial work has been conspicuously ignored by researchers. Butcher and Clarke (1999) called organizational politics ‘the missing discipline of management’.

Some authors argued that politics are endemic to managerial roles given the very nature of managerial work. Mintzberg (1990, p. 168) defined managers as individuals who have ‘formal authority over an organizational unit’ and identified three core areas of managerial work: interpersonal, informational and decisional. These areas require managers to take on various roles such as: figurehead, leader, liaison, spokesperson, monitor, disseminator, entrepreneur, disturbance handler, allocator and negotiator. In a review of evidence on what managers do, Hales (1986) outlined very similar roles as part of a manager’s general/administrative work (as opposed to the specialist/technical work). He also stressed the ‘informal or unofficial aspects of managerial work’ (p. 99), such as power struggles for resources, interpreting and interpreting and implementing policy at a local level and managing informal reward systems.

Porter, Allen, Angle (1981) suggested that managers need political skill in order to negotiate and reconcile the competing demands of different constituencies. Butcher and Clarke (2003) pleaded for the constructive value of organizational

politics as integral part of managerial roles. It was also recognized that leading in pluralistic organizations requires individuals to navigate diffuse power systems and conflicting objectives (Denis, Lamouthe and Langley, 2001). Indeed, Ammeter et al. (2002) suggested that leaders' political behaviour may be instrumental in reducing ambiguity and constructing shared meaning around ill-defined organizational phenomena.

Luthans (1988) distinguished between successful and effective managers, thus drawing an implicit contrast between promotability and effectiveness. He noticed that while effective managers focused on quality and quantity of the work and had committed subordinates, successful managers spent considerably more time on networking activities and devoted less time to traditional managerial tasks. More recently, political engagement was found to be related to career growth even among employees in non-managerial roles (Liu, Liu, and Wu, 2010). This suggests that being able to navigate politics is important for managers not only in order to fulfil their role, but also in order to progress within the organization.

2.3.2 Perceptions of organizational politics

A key area of investigation in micro-approaches of politics concerns individuals' views on organizational politics as a workplace phenomenon. Extant studies on this topic differ in their approach to investigating individuals' perceptions of politics. Several studies focused predominantly on evaluative perceptions of politics, exploring the perceived ethicality, appropriateness or desirability of organizational politics or political behaviours. The emphasis is therefore on people's attitudes, judgements or values related to organizational politics. These studies will be reviewed in the beginning of this section. Other studies were more concerned with examining how prevalent politics are perceived to be, and not necessarily with gaining insight into individuals' opinions about the nature of politics. The focus is thus on attempting to ascertain the degree to which organizations are seen to be politicised and the effect this has on individuals. These different emphases are not always mutually exclusive.

2.3.2.1 Evaluative perceptions of politics

In one of the pioneer studies into managers' perceptions of organizational politics, Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwich and Mayes (1980) interviewed 87 US managers. The findings suggested that managers considered politics be more prevalent in middle and upper management role, compared to lower levels of management. Politics were also seen to be employed in order to pursue individual interests, rather than collective ones. Organizational politics were perceived to be highly instrumental but also potentially risky in achieving personal and organizational goals. In terms of personal outcomes, participants identified career advancement by far as the most salient benefit, and loss of power, position and credibility the key harmful effect. In terms of organizational outcomes, participants mentioned the most helpful effects of politics as getting things done and navigating organizational processes; however, they also noted that politics can distract from organizational goals and lead to a misuse of resources. These results paint a fairly complex picture, suggesting that managers' perceptions of organizational politics are nuanced. The study did not provide any indication about the sex of the managers interviewed.

Concurring with some of these results, Gandz and Murray (1980) conducted a survey into the experience of workplace politics on 428 US and Canadian MBA students. Findings indicated that organizational processes perceived as most politicized were the ones which had fewer established rules - interdepartmental coordination, promotions, transfers and dismissals. Respondents also perceived politics to be more prevalent at higher managerial levels. While respondents recognized that politics are inevitable and even instrumental for executive success, they also saw politics as dysfunctional and 'did not feel that this is the way it *ought* to be' (p. 245, original emphasis). Gandz and Murray noted that their large survey sample was 'predominantly masculine' and did not conduct analyses by gender.

Individual perceptions were also researched by exploring the ethical aspects of politics. In a survey of 302 US managers Zahra (1985) explored managerial attitudes regarding the ethics of organizational politics and reasons for resorting

to politics. His results indicated that female managers and older staff found politics to be more ethically problematic. Younger employees and junior and middle managers considered politics important for career promotion, while senior managers felt that their roles compelled them to engage in politics. Zahra found weak links between background values (religious affiliation), work experience (sector) and perceptions related to politics. In a subsequent study on the same sample, Zahra (1989) suggested that executives who showed concern with status, anomie¹, external locus of control and low acceptance of others were more accepting of organizational politics.

The studies discussed above examined individuals' perceptions of politics by employing the term 'politics' as such, without defining it or asking participants to define it themselves. This is problematic because given the definitional controversies associated with the term such results do not provide much insight into what exactly participants found to be ethical or acceptable (i.e. what exactly 'politics' means for them). Sharpening the focus of investigation, several studies have examined people's perceptions of specific political behaviours. For example, Ralston, Giacalone and Terpstra (1994) asked US and Chinese professionals to rate the ethicality of political behaviours, defined and operationalized as strategies of upward influence. The results pointed out cultural differences in ethical perceptions: US managers deemed rational persuasion, impression management and ingratiation more ethical than Chinese managers did. In contrast, Chinese managers saw more acceptable strategies such as information control and strong-arm coercion. Zanzi and O'Neill (2001) assessed the social desirability of several political tactics among 288 MBA students in the US. They identified two categories of tactics: sanctioned or acceptable (use of expertise, super-ordinate goals, image building, networking, persuasion and coalition building) and unsanctioned (intimidation, use of surrogates, blame or attack, manipulation, organizational placement, cooptation and control of information). While these two studies did not make gender comparisons, Drory and Beaty (1991) have specifically investigated gender

¹ Defined as 'sense of estrangement within a social system' (p.19).

differences in the perception of political influence tactics. Their results demonstrated that men were more tolerant of political behaviour compared to women, downplaying its potential harmful effects. Both men and women were more tolerant of political behaviour when exhibited by members of their own gender, thus displaying 'potential gender solidarity' (p. 257).

More recently, Buchannan (2008) conducted a survey on a sample of 250 British managers, exploring their personal experience and views on politics. His study concluded that by and large, managers perceived organizational politics as necessary and ethical. Buchanan noted that a majority of male and female managers agreed with statements such as 'managers who play organization politics well can improve their career', 'personal reputations can be enhanced by appropriate game-playing', or 'the departments of skilled organization politicians attract higher levels of resource'. However, he also commented that female managers were more likely to adopt an 'understand but avoid' stance with respect to politics, while male managers were more likely to view politics as 'necessary to play'. Women also appeared less prepared to hurt others when engaging in political tactics. A closer look at the items employed in the survey suggests that gender differences in responses appeared when respondents were asked about their own behaviour, as opposed to being asked about politics in general or about how other managers (should) engage in politics.

Overall, this stream indicates some consistent themes but also contradictory results regarding the views held by individuals, and particularly managers, with regards to organizational politics. Evident from the review of these various studies is a tendency to investigate individuals' or managers' perceptions of politics by soliciting their beliefs about occurrence and the nature of politics in general. This points to a relative neglect of the subjective experience of politics, and insufficient evidence about what managers believe and feel about their personal involvement in politics.

2.3.2.2 Perceived degree of workplace politicization

Drory (1993) explored the linked between perceived political climate and job attitudes by asking 200 Israeli participants in various organizations and roles to which extent certain decisions and processes in their respective organizations are influenced by 'technical professional considerations' versus 'political power'. He found that for non-supervisory and female employees, perceived politicization correlated with more negative job attitudes.

The most established stream of research with regards to politics perceptions is based on the work of Ferris, Russ and Fandt (1989). The authors drew a distinction between individuals' perceptions of organizational politics and actual political activities within organizations. Perceptions of politics are generally understood to represent employees' subjective beliefs regarding the extent to which the work environment is influenced by co-workers and supervisors engaging in self-serving behaviour (Harrell-Cook, Ferris, and Dulebohn, 1999). Ferris et al. (1989) emphasized that individual perceptions are critical, because perceptions will trigger specific cognitive and behavioural responses. They posited several antecedents and consequences of organizational politics perceptions. Specifically, they discussed three categories of antecedents: organizational influences (centralization, formalization, hierarchical level and span of control), job/work influences (job autonomy, skill variety, advancement opportunities, interactions with others) and personal influences (age, sex, Machiavellianism and self-monitoring). The authors also proposed that relevant outcomes of politics perceptions are job involvement, job anxiety, organizational withdrawal and job satisfaction. In 1992, Ferris and Kacmar tested the model for the first time, proposing perception of politics scale (POPS).

For the last two decades, the POPS model has been widely tested. In a meta-analysis of studies in this area, Stepanski, Kershaw and Arkakelian (2000) concluded that with the exception of Machiavellianism, none of the antecedents were robustly related to perceptions of politics. In a comprehensive review of over 20 empirical studies on POPS, Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, and Ammeter (2002) found consistent support for the positive link between lack

of formalization and centralization and perceptions of politics, but less consistent support for hierarchical level. In terms of job/work antecedents, studies found consistent evidence for the relation between POPS and advancement opportunities, and interactions with supervisor and co-workers. Miller, Rutherford and Kolodinsky (2008) carried out a meta-analysis of 59 studies investigating the consequences of politics perceptions and found an enduring negative relationship between POPS and job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Their meta-analysis also revealed a moderate positive relationship between POPS and job stress and turnover intentions.

This stream of literature is thus concerned with the antecedents and consequences of people's perceptions regarding the existence of politics in the workplace. However, the way in which 'politics' are conceptualized and measured in the POPS model requires further commentary. This scale, employed in the plethora of empirical studies burgeoning over the last two decades, contains items such as: 'Favouritism rather than merit determines who gets ahead', 'You can get along around here by being a good guy, regardless of the quality of your work' or 'There are 'cliques' or 'in-groups' that hinder the effectiveness around here'. In other words, the operational definition of the 'politics' concept is loaded with negative connotations. Once politics are equated with unfairness, it is perhaps not surprising that the consequences of perceiving the workplace as politicized are found to be predominantly negative: job withdrawal, decreased job satisfaction and job performance, occupational stress.

Therefore, the main conceptual limitation of the POPS model is that it measures respondents' perceptions to a definition of politics that is essentially negative and arguably restrictive. Revisiting the foundational studies of this stream (Ferris et al., 1989, in Giacalone and Rosenfeld, 1989; Ferris and Kacmar, 1992), it becomes apparent that the authors' working definition of organizational politics is derived from a selective review of available literature, and not informed by an exploration of what individuals actually perceive or define politics to be. Research on evaluative perceptions of politics (discussed in the

previous section) indicated however that individuals' understanding and opinions about politics are complex, multifaceted and often contradictory, varying depending on the hierarchical role held. In addition, studies employing the POPS model have not particularly attempted to unpack managers' perceptions or attitudes about politics.

2.3.3 Antecedents of political behaviours

DuBrin (1974) suggested that propensity to engage in politics is 'a joint function of individual and organizational characteristics' (p. 169). Two major categories of causes leading to political behaviours are mentioned in the literature: structural and individual. Structural determinants refer to the context in which organizational behaviours appear, whilst individual factors refer to personal characteristic, traits or dispositions that make individuals more inclined to engage in political behaviours.

2.3.3.1 Structural antecedents

One of the contextual factors most frequently associated with organizational politics is the existence of overt or covert *conflicting views and agendas* within the organization. Typical triggers of political conflict were identified to be the lack of agreement over the objectives to pursue (either because formal objectives are not embraced or because there are informal, parallel or opposed individual/group objectives) and the ways of pursuing them (Farrell and Petersen, 1982; Velasquez, Moberg and Cavanagh, 1983; Dill and Pearson, 1984; Vredenburg and Maurer, 1984; Zahra, 1989).

Ambiguity with respect to goals, roles or decision-making was also found to increase the frequency of political behaviours (Pfeffer, 1981; Vredenburg and Maurer, 1984; Drory and Dromm, 1990; Novelli, Flynn, and Elloy, 1994; Parker, Dipboye and Jackson, 1995). Gandz and Murray (1980) showed that the organizational processes perceived by managers as the most politicized were those less formalized, with few established rules (interdepartmental coordination, delegation of authority, promotions and transfers). Results

obtained by Ferris and Kacmar (1992) support the negative relationship between degree of formalization and perceptions of politics. Perhaps not surprisingly, *change and uncertainty* in organizations were found to lead to increased political activity (Dawson and Buchanan, 2005; Knights and Murray, 1994; Pettigrew, 1973). In other words, the less prescriptive organizational settings and processes are, the more likely it is that politics will occur.

Moreover, *scarcity of resources* was also found to stimulate political activity, since pursuing different goals within the organization would be much easier if sufficient resources were available. Buchanan and Badham (1999) and Gray and Ariss (1985) pointed out the importance of political behaviour during organizational change processes, intrinsically characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity, the need to reallocate resources and consequently a more or less substantial redistribution of power.

Another structural factor identified as favouring political behaviour is the *centrality of one's activity* (departmental or individual role) within the organization. Departments or individuals playing a central role have the ability to create dependency by controlling others' access to organizational resources (Pettigrew, 1973). Madison et al. (1980) found that managers perceived certain departments or organizational layers more politicised than others (e.g. marketing, sales and boards). Consistent with these findings, many empirical studies showed that politics are generally considered to be more intense at higher organizational levels (managerial) and that this perception intensifies as one's own organizational power or status decreases (Drory, 1993; Novelli, Flynn and Elloy, 1994). This conveys once again the inextricable link between power and politics.

2.3.3.2 Individual antecedents

A range of empirical studies revealed certain individual characteristics associated with the likelihood of engaging in politics in the workplace. These characteristics can be classified as dispositional and non-dispositional (Davis-Blake and Pfeffer, 1989).

Dispositional factors

Need for power/achievement and *concern with status* in life were found to predispose to engagement in politics (Allen et al., 1979; Zahra, 1989). According to Murray (1938, in Treadway et al., 2005), need for achievement represents a desire to 'overcome obstacles and attain a high standard. To excel one's self. To rival and surpass others.' (p. 164). Need for achievement was found to be positively related to self-presentation behaviours intended to convey competence (Leary and Kowalski, 1990) and to political behaviour in particular (Treadway et al., 2005). McClelland and Burnham (1976, in Porter, Allen and Angle, 1981) found need for power to be widely specific to managers, a finding which may also explain the prevalence of politics in managerial roles. Kirchmeyer's study of managers (1990) also indicated that the main predictor for women's involvement in politics was the need for power.

Machiavellianism is frequently associated with politics (Biberman, 1985), especially with antisocial political tactics (Porter et al., 1981; Ferris et al., 1994). Machiavellian individuals tend to initiate and control the dynamics of interpersonal relations; they are manipulative, rational and indifferent to social norms. The term 'cynicism' is also used to refer to this personality style (Vredenburg and Maurer, 1984).

Risk-seeking propensity is likely to favour political behaviour because this type of behaviour does not comply with rules formally expressed and commonly embraced (Porter et al., 1981). Effective political actors were described by managers as aggressive and devious, amongst other (Allen et al., 1979).

Self-monitoring refers to individuals' tendency and ability to control their behaviour and adjust it in a way that allows them to influence the perceptions other people have of them (Synder, 1987). Fandt and Ferris (1990) found that self-monitoring is linked to information manipulation, while von Bayer, Shirk and Zanna (1981) suggested that it is positively related to the use of impression management in recruitment interviews.

Locus of control refers to individuals' beliefs about their own ability to control the events that surround them. Accordingly, a distinction has been made between internals and externals, with internals believing they have more control over their destiny and externals believing that outside forces shape their lives. Both Zahra (1989) and Kirchmeyer (1990) found that appetite for politics was positively related to externality.

Political will. Mintzberg (1983) argued that efficient political actors must display two characteristics: political will and political skill. While political skill is the ability to engage in politics competently, political will is considered to be a precursor of political behaviours and refers to 'willingness to expend energy in pursuit of political goals' (Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar and Ferris, 2005). The concept of political will is regularly invoked by authors in the field, yet the only study that attempted to bring empirical support to it was conducted by Treadway et al. (2005). However, these authors operationalized political will as need for achievement and intrinsic motivation, therefore by resorting to the same dispositional measures outlined above. Using this dispositional definition of political will, the study found that political will predicts the likelihood of engaging in political behaviours, whilst political skill moderates the relationship between political behaviour and emotional work.

Non-dispositional individual factors

Status plays an important role in predicting political behaviour. Status has generally been operationalized as position in the organizational hierarchy. Empirical data show that employees at lower organizational level perceive management processes as being more political than higher level employees. They also consider politics less acceptable and perceptions of politics generate more job dissatisfaction for them (Drory, 1993; Novelli, Flynn and Elloy, 1994). Moreover, the behavioural means chosen to play politics were found to vary according to status: 'softer' tactics are more frequently used by less powerful individuals and vice versa (Kipnis and Schmidt, 1988; Sussman et al., 2002). Vecchio and Sussmann (2001) found that propensity to use upward influence was related to organizational level. Ferris et al. (1994) proposed that

accountability is a contextual factor making individuals prone to political behaviours.

Sex is a demographic variable probably related to propensity towards political behaviours via moderating factors such as status, gender norms, etc. Although the research on gender aspects of politics is currently quite scarce, it consistently points out women's distaste for workplace politics. This will be discussed in further detail in section 2.5 of this chapter.

2.3.4 Political behaviours

A core issue of investigation in the literature on politics is concerned with actual political behaviours, and attempts to shed insight into what individuals effectively do when engaging in politics. The literature review indicated a lack of consistency in the terms used to describe actual political engagement: 'techniques', 'strategies', 'power tactics', 'behaviours' have all been used interchangeably. In this thesis, I use the term 'behaviour' to categorize these studies and to refer to individual engagement in politics. The rationale for doing so lies in its fairly neutral connotation. For the sake of accuracy however, I will report the terms used by the authors themselves when examining political behaviours. There are numerous taxonomies of political influence behaviour in the literature. Below I will present the ones most frequently quoted.

Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwich, and Mayes (1979) have interviewed eighty seven managers, asking them to elicit examples of political tactics. The eight categories most frequently mentioned were: attacking or blaming others, use of information, impression management, support building for ideas, ingratiation, coalitions, association with influential others and creating obligations.

Exploring intra-organizational influence tactics, Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson (1980) distinguished between assertiveness, rationality, ingratiation, exchange, coalitions, upward appeals, sanctions and blocking tactics. This taxonomy was used as a basis in order to conceptualize and measure political behaviour in numerous empirical studies in the field (Yukl and Tracey, 1992; Vigoda and

Cohen, 2002). Ralston, Giacalone and Terprsta (1994) used a taxonomy of job tactics in two cultural contexts – the US and China. The tactics were defined as Good Soldier (hard work), Rational Persuasion (earning consideration on the basis of abilities and accomplishments), Ingratiation, Image Management, Personal Networking, Information Control and Strong-Arm Coercion (illegal tactics such as blackmail). They found that Strong-Arm Coercion was deemed more acceptable by Hong-Kong managers compared to US managers. Kipnis and Schmidt (1988) identified six patterns of upward influence in organization (reason, friendliness, assertiveness, bargaining, higher authority and coalition) and consequently four upward influence styles (Shotgun, Tactician, Ingratiator and Bystander). Shotgun individuals displayed high level of use of all six strategies, particularly assertiveness and authority. Tacticians and Ingratiators scored high on reason and friendliness respectively, and had average scores for the other influence strategies. Bystanders made a lower use of all these strategies overall, as compared to other profiles.

Kumar and Ghadially (1989) focused on only four political behaviours - ingratiation, structure change, cooptation and threat - whilst Vredenburg and Maurer (1984) describe eleven political strategies: accumulate and control resources, bargain, form coalitions/informal teams, orchestrate events, maintain personal flexibility, reduce dependence on others and instil dependence within others, engage in conflict, anticipate and prepare for others' actions and reactions, cultivate good interpersonal relations, exploit others, and manage career.

A rich repertoire of influence tactics is described by Zanzi, Arthur and Shamir (1991): exchange of favours, cooptation, rituals and symbols, manipulation, mentoring, organizational placements, persuasion, coping with uncertainty, intimidation and innuendos, control of information, rule-oriented tactics, using surrogates, image building, rule-evading tactics, networking, ingratiation, super-ordinate goals, providing resources, use of expertise, piggybacking, blaming or attacking others, outside experts and coalition building. In addition to these tactics, Buchanan and Badham (2007) also mention: selective information,

favouritism, avoiding criticism, using key players to support initiatives, stimulating debate, self-promotion, rewards, coercion, threat, blaming others for mistakes, taking credit for the work of others, using others to deliver bad news, highlighting other peoples' errors, compromising now to win later, misinformation, rumour spreading and blackmail. In their investigation of perceptions of organizational politics, Ferris and Kacmar (1992) refer to certain political tactics as well – although the purpose of the scale is to ascertain how common these tactics are perceived to be. Some examples conveyed by the POPS are: favouritism, ingratiation, withholding or distorting information, coalitions, impression management, exchanges and reciprocity.

All these studies demonstrate that the repertoire of political behaviours is potentially very wide, ranging from pro-social to antisocial behaviours. Attempting to go beyond the identification of discreet political behaviours, several scholars proposed typologies of political behaviours. Building on Tedeschi and Melburg's (1984) distinction between defensive and assertive behaviour, Valle and Perrewé (2000) examined the use of proactive and reactive political behaviours when in workplace environments perceived as politicized. They used Kipnis et al.'s typology to operationalize proactive behaviours, and Ashforth and Lee's (1990) typology of defensive political behaviours: avoiding action (passing the buck, playing dumb, stalling), avoiding blame (playing safe, scapegoating, misrepresenting) and avoiding change (protecting turf). Their results suggested that under conditions of perceived politics, reactive political behaviours led to more negative work outcomes.

2.3.4.1 Outcomes of political behaviours

A high degree of ambivalence is expressed in most of the studies, when it comes to assessing the consequences of political behaviours. Buchanan and Badham (2007) synthesise these outcomes by pointing out the functional and dysfunctional aspects for both individuals and organizations. This taxonomy will be used below to report finding from the literature review, in addition to the authors' own findings.

At an individual level, the main positive outcomes mentioned are related to career benefits and especially hierarchical progression and power achievement (Perrewe and Nelson, 2004; Mann, 1995). Engaging in political behaviours is positively related to high job performance especially for leaders and managers (Hartley and Branick, 2006), who see it as a way of getting things done (Madison et al., 1980). Political behaviours can enhance personal reputation (Hochwarter, Ferris, Zinko, Arnell and James, 2007), but can damage it as well (Buchanan and Badham, 2007). The managers interviewed by Madison et al. (1979) mentioned loss of power, strategic position or credibility as the main harmful effects of political behaviours for individual. Other negative outcomes for individuals are frustration, anxiety, discomfort on the side of the actor and the targets of political behaviours.

At an organizational level, Buchanan and Badham (2007) argue that political behaviours can have both positive and negative outcomes with respect to: effectiveness, conflict resolution, organizational change, communication. Similarly, Madison et al. (1979) showed that politics are considered by managers as a way of achieving organizational goals and getting things done, therefore strongly related to the good functioning or survival of the organization. Other organizational benefits mentioned by their respondents were increased visibility of ideas or people and better coordination and communication. Dill and Pearson (1984) found that adopting a political approach to influence, as opposed to a rational one, increased the performance of project managers. Furthermore, some authors stressed the importance of moderating factors when assessing the outcomes of political behaviours. Engaging in political behaviours was found to lead to increased job performance ratings and to entail less emotional exhaustion when individuals benefited from a favourable reputation (Hochwarter et al, 2007).

The evidence reviewed in this section suggests that the nature and the outcomes of political behaviours vary tremendously. One factor accounting for this is the actual skill with which these behaviours are displayed. This will be discussed in the next section.

2.3.5 Political skill

In addition to political behaviours, political skill has also made the object of investigation in the field of organizational politics. This sub-section will review research pertaining to political skill. Essentially, the distinction between political behaviour and skill rests on the assumption that merely engaging in politics is not equivalent with doing so successfully or competently.

Pfeffer (1981) was one of the first scholars to analyse organizations from a political perspective and to suggest that political skill is a necessary ingredient of success in organizations. Mintzberg (1983) considered political skill to be synonymous with using influence through persuasion, negotiation and manipulation. Hayes (1984) proposed that politically competent managers expect resistance when attempting to get things done but are nevertheless able to pursue and achieve the outcomes desired. Politically incompetent managers, in contrast, behave 'like bulls in a china shop' and create unwarranted resistance from others.

Baddeley and James (1987) proposed a descriptive model of managerial political skill encompassing two dimensions: reading and carrying. The 'reading' dimension ranges from 'politically aware' to 'politically unaware' and refers to individuals' ability to decipher the political complexities of their environments (identify covert and overt agendas, read the informal power web and grasp the nature of decision-making processes). The 'carrying' dimension entails acting with integrity at one end and psychological game-playing at the other. By combining these two dimensions, the authors described four types of political behaviour: wise, clever, inept and innocent, metaphorically associated with owl, fox, donkey and sheep. *Innocent* behaviour is defined by low awareness and high integrity, entailing respect for power based on expertise and authority, obliviousness to covert processes and procedures, transparent, principled and ethical approach. *Inept* behaviour occurs when there is low awareness and low integrity, typically denoting unskilled and unprincipled interpersonal behaviour, and a tendency to play psychological games but inability to detect those of

others. Psychological game-playing coupled with high awareness leads to *clever* behaviour, frequent among individuals who seek power and are able to grasp and leverage on the covert political dynamics of the workplace, but do so in dishonest and manipulative ways. Finally, *wise* behaviour relies on high awareness of formal and informal power sources and organizational process, as well as principled and interpersonally skilled approach. Widely used in management development programmes, this model has the benefit of explicitly defining, in virtue of its four typologies, both skilled and unskilled political behaviours.

Other models of political skill have chiefly endeavoured to define political skill as presence of political ability. Among micro-approaches of politics, the most widely used measure in this research stream is the Political Skill Inventory (PSI), developed by Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony and Gilmore (2000). Drawing on concepts related to social effectiveness in the workplace, these authors initially defined political skill as an 'interpersonal style that combines social awareness and the ability to communicate well'. The authors suggested that being politically skilled means not only understanding the social and interpersonal dynamics of the workplace, but also being able to adjust to it in a manner that inspires trust and conveys positive reactions from others; it implies the joint ability to 'read' the organizational politics and to exert influence accordingly. A more refined definition of the concept subsequently used equated political skill with 'the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives' (Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas and Frink, 2005, p. 127).

Ferris and collaborators (2000) suggested that political skill relies on other social skills such as social intelligence, emotional intelligence, ego-resiliency, self-efficacy, self-monitoring, tacit knowledge and practical intelligence. However, political skill is distinct from these in that it conveys a style component determined by the synergy of these various social skills and is aimed at achieving success in organizations. Authors in the field (Ferris, Hochwarter,

Douglas, Blass, Kolodinsky and Treadway, 2002) differentiated between political behaviour and political skill by stating that the former is the 'what' of political influence, while the latter is the 'how' of it.

Four critical dimensions emerged after conceptual refinement and empirical development of the political skill construct: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity (Ferris, Treadway, Perrewe, Brouer, Douglas and Lux, 2007). The first dimension, social astuteness refers to individuals' ability to observe and understand the behaviour of others. The second dimension refers to individual's ability to exert influence on others by adapting their behaviour to different targets of influence and contextual settings. The third dimension, networking ability, concerns the ability to develop contacts and networks instrumental in achieving objectives. Finally, the fourth dimension - apparent sincerity – conveys that politically skilled individuals are, or appear to others, authentic, genuine and forthright.

A range of studies have examined the role of political skill for employees in general, but particularly for leaders and managers. Subordinates with high political skill were found to be more effective in their influence attempts toward superiors (Harris, Zivnuska, Kacmar and Shaw, 2007; Treadway, Duke, Ferris, Adams and Thatcher, 2007). Political skill was also described as an antidote for workplace stressors such as conflicts (Perrewe, Ferris, Frink, and Anthony, 2000; Perrewe, Zellars, Rossi, Kacmar and Raslton, 2004). In addition, reputation was found to moderate the link between political skill and job performance (Liu, Ferris, Zinko, Perrewe, Weitz, and Xu, 2007). Demonstrating its relevance in managerial roles, Semadar, Robins and Ferris (2006) found that political skill was the strongest predictor of managerial performance. Douglas and Ammeter (2004) found that interpersonal influence/control and networking ability are strongly related to positive ratings of leaders' effectiveness. Leaders' political skill predicts perceived organizational support, trust, and organizational commitment (Treadway, Hochwarter, Ferris, Kacmar, Douglas, Ammeter and Buckley, 2004). Proposing a meta-theoretical framework of the political skill construct, Ferris, Treadway, Perrewe, Brouer, Douglas and Lux (2007) argued

that perceptiveness, affability, active influence and control are dispositional antecedents of political skill. Derived from that, personality traits such as extraversion and proactivity were found to be positively related to political skill (Liu, Ferris, Zinko, Perrewe, Weitz and Xu, 2007). It must be stressed that studies of political skill using the PSI have mostly used US-based samples, from either private corporations or university settings.

Another conceptualization of political skill was offered by Hartley, Fletcher, Wilton, Woodman and Ungemach (2007). Through a large scale survey examining the views of 1479 senior managers across multiple UK sectors, corroborated with 12 interviews, the authors mapped out five interrelated dimensions of political skill: personal skills, interpersonal skills, reading people and situations, building alignment and alliances and strategic direction and scanning. Within this framework, personal skills are the bedrock of other political skills in that they are related to one's self-awareness and awareness of others. Interpersonal skills refer to 'the capacity to influence the thinking and behaviour of others, getting buy-in from people over whom the person has no direct authority, and making people feel valued' (p. 28). Reading people and situations is essentially equivalent with awareness of the dynamics among various stakeholders and their respective agendas, in specific situations; this dimension is about identifying interests, power, and influence, and is therefore quite analytical. The fourth dimension, building alignment and alliances, is more action-driven and conveys the ability to recognize the multitude of interests at stake and to find a realistic consensus. Finally, strategic direction and scanning is about connecting the ability to read and navigate power dynamics with the strategic aim of the organization. Using this framework, Hartley and collaborators found that self-ratings of political skill increased with seniority of managerial role (from middle managers to directors). In addition, they found that self-ratings of male and female managers were not substantially different, contradicting the notion that women may lack political skill. In contrast to conceptualizations of political skill using the PSI, which pay little attention to the context in which political skill is deployed, this framework also stressed four inter-related levels at which political skill may be relevant: internal politics of the

organization, strategic partners and alliances, formal political interactions and institutions, and policy context of the organization. The emphasis on political skill at very senior levels introduces the notion of political leadership *in* the organization and *of* the organization.

In conclusion, these various studies of political skill point to some common critical elements. First, a foundational element of political effectiveness is the ability to understand or diagnose the political dimension of the workplace, referred to as 'reading' by Baddeley and James (1988) and Hartley et al. (2007), and 'astuteness' by Ferris et al. (2007). In their process framework of organizational politics, Vredenburg and Maurer (1984) alluded to the same notion when discussing the importance of 'political sensitivity', which they defined as awareness of norms, an orientation towards covert organizational processes and knowledge of significant others. These models also suggest that a second facet of political skill is related to actual political engagement, and point out the criticality of relating to others when navigating politics, by leveraging on interpersonal skills and alliances (Baddeley and James, 1988; Hartley et al. 2007), influence and networking (Ferris et al., 2007). However, the differences in the way political skill is defined or dimensionalized raise pending questions about the nature of the construct. Finally, some authors discussed the idea that political skill can be developed, suggesting methods such as experiential learning, mentoring and role-modelling (Hartley et al., 2007; Ferris et al. 2007; Hartley, 2009), or training and coaching (Ferris, Anthony, Kolodinsky, Gilmore, and Harvey, 2002). Nevertheless, the research tackling developmental aspects of political skill remains scarce.

2.3.6 Gender, power and organizational politics

2.3.6.1 Gender and organizational politics

A last stream of literature relevant for the research interest underpinning this thesis is concerns gender and organizational politics. Up to date, there is scant investigation of gender aspects related to organizational politics. In attempting to sketch a portrait of successful women, White, Cox and Cooper (1997)

interviewed 48 high-achieving women and found that power and politics was one of the six factors critical for success. While these women stressed the importance of being aware of political processes in the workplace, they were also cautious about becoming entrenched in political games, which they depicted in negative terms.

Arroba and James (1988) raised the issue of women's distaste for politics, suggesting that women often lack confidence in handling politics. Drawing on the 'Reading-Carrying' model of political skill, the authors point out a number of obstacles obstructing women's ability to read the political environment: male-dominated cultures which may lead to feeling of inadequacy and defensiveness, exclusion from informal networks, discomfort with the notion of power. A few suggestions are formulated in order to support women in developing political skills: ignoring the normative pressures to be nice and self-effacing, familiarization with power and the strategic purpose of the company and greater immersion in the informal life of the organization through networking. Echoing some of these points, Mann (1995) argued that women fail to recognize the importance of politics because they are not sufficiently familiarized with the informal mechanisms of power (networking, power coalitions, and old boys' clubs). Perrewe and Nelson (2004) stated that women's career progression in organizations could be facilitated by their political skill, which would help them gain access to relevant inside information. The authors also noted that while men view politics as part of the rules of the game and leverage on the informal dynamics in advantageous ways, women tend to rely on the formal organizational system when fulfilling their roles and managing their careers.

However, only two empirical studies have examined the link between gender and politics. In a study of 55 high-profile US executive women, Mainiero (1994) mapped out four stages of executive development: political naiveté, building credibility, shouldering responsibility and refining a style. Her findings suggest that while taking on leadership roles, women underwent a process of political seasoning, progressing from naïve to astute politicians. Naiveté is a stage chiefly defined by lack of knowledge about the corporate culture. The other

three stages outlined by Mainiero encompass elements of political maturation (i.e. building alliances and interpersonal networks), but exceed the issue of politics by addressing seasoning lessons such as the importance of delegation and team-building or managing work-life balance. Therefore, these issues are not directly relevant to understanding women's relation with politics or the role of politics in executive roles in general. By interviewing female business graduates, Mackenzie Davey (2008) found that women tend to construe politics as irrational, instrumental and competitive and therefore more consistent with masculine behavioural patterns. Although aware of the importance of politics in securing power, women remained conflicted between wanting to have more power and rejecting the political games necessary to obtain it.

These few studies point out the criticality of political skill for women in general, and particularly for women in managerial roles. They also hint to a certain reluctance among women to engage in politics. Most of the mainstream literature on politics reviewed in the previous sections of this thesis has treated political engagement as a gender-neutral phenomenon. Early studies of managerial perceptions of politics are conspicuous in their neglect of gender. More recently, Buchanan (2008) found that both male and female managers considered politics important and necessary, yet women appeared less willing to engage in certain political tactics, particularly in aggressive ones. Therefore, lack of political awareness alone cannot fully account for women's non-involvement in politics, especially at more senior levels. Studies of political skill using the PSI have treated gender as a control variable, being more concerned with isolating the impact of gender on the hypothesized relationships between political skill and various outcomes, than with unpacking the effect of gender on the acquisition or deployment of political skill. Hartley et al. (2007) found no gender differences between the self-ratings of senior managers with regards to political skill. However, their study showed that men tend to view politics as the pursuit of self-interest more often than women, who tend to think about politics in terms of coalitions and alliances.

2.3.6.2 Gender and power in organizations

While there has been a relative neglect of the relation between gender and organizational politics in the mainstream politics literature, the field of gender in management has advanced several frameworks or theories related to gender and power, suggesting that power in the workplace is not a gender-free phenomenon. In their influential review of gender and power in organizations, Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) proposed four levels of analysis accounting for the gender gap in power: social systems, organizational, interpersonal and personal. The organizational and interpersonal levels are relevant to understanding certain obstacles related to politics. At the organizational level, the authors note that there is a persistent gender gap in terms of structural power due to the fact that there are simply fewer women at higher managerial ranks and their opportunities for career progression are squandered. At the interpersonal level, Ragins and Sundstrom stressed that it is more difficult for women to penetrate informal power networks due to their minority status, an observation echoed by more recent commentary regarding the obstacles faced by women leaders in organizations (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

Gender and power dynamics in organizations have made the object of investigation among both sociologists and psychologists. Although not directly concerned with organizational politics, several studies found that women engage less in certain behaviours that have been described in the above sections as political. For example, gender differences in networking were highlighted, whereby women's networks were found to be less developed or less effective at enabling career progression (Burt, 1998; Ibarra, 1997). Women were found to eschew or to make different use of self-promotion and impression management (Singh, Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2002; Guadagno and Cialdini, 2007). These behavioural differences between men and women are likely to shape their engagement in organizational politics.

Drawing on French and Raven's (1959) typology, Carli (1999) reviews gender differences in power and their effect on interpersonal influence in the workplace. Five sources of power are discussed: reward (ability to distribute rewards),

coercive (ability to administer punishment), expert (perceived expertise/competence), legitimate (formal position of authority) and referent (likeability and social attractiveness). By examining evidence in socio-psychology, Carli finds that men generally possess higher levels of expert and legitimate power than women do and that women possess higher levels of referent power than men do. She also posits that it is generally more difficult for women to use social influence strategies relying on coercive, legitimate and expert power, due to the fact that in light of gender prejudice, women tend to be perceived as less competent and less authoritative than men. Social role theory offers a compelling explanation for these effects. The theory posits that individuals hold consensual descriptive beliefs about the attributes men and women hold and normative expectations about the behaviours men and women should display (Eagly and Karau, 2002). These gender stereotypes depict men as agentic, forceful, assertive, and women as communal, kind and gentle in their social roles. Descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes obstruct women's progression on the organizational ladder (Heilman, 2001) due to the fact that they prescribe a narrow range of acceptable behaviours for women attempting to exert power and influence. Consequently, role incongruity stems from a perceived mismatch between 'feminine' and leadership-related behaviours and results in women being deemed less suitable for leadership roles (Eagly, 2005). This general (in)congruency principle was also found to apply to perceptions of managerial roles. Extensive research on the "think manager-think male" phenomenon evidenced that both men and women tend to think that the characteristics of successful middle managers are more likely to be held by men in general than by women in general (Schein, 1973; Schein and Muller, 1992; Schein, 2001, 2007). To sum up, this stream of research demonstrates that being male or female impacts considerably on one's chances to acquire and deploy formal and informal power in the workplace.

While in the research discussed above issues around gender and power were examined mostly at an individual and relational level, other theories have focused on the structural dimension of gender inequalities in organizations, suggesting that gender disadvantage stems not only from sheer numeric

disparity between men and women at top organizational levels, but also from tokenism, non-inclusive group dynamics and masculine organizational cultures fostered by this unequal representation. As early as 1974, Kanter observed that organizational structures and roles are shaped by the images of people occupying them – which were traditionally men. She specifically observes that managerial roles are defined by a ‘masculine ethic’ which emphasizes rationality and stereotypical male qualities, particularly ‘a tough-minded approach to problems’ and ‘a capacity to set aside emotional considerations in the interest of task accomplishment’. Kanter concludes that ‘while organizations were being defined as sex-neutral machines, masculine principles were dominating their authority structures’ (p. 46). Kanter’s work focused on the effect of numerical disparities in representation on workplace dynamics, a phenomenon applying to women but also any other minorities. She specifically discussed the effects of tokenism, suggesting that performance pressures, social isolation, and role encapsulation are consequences of uneven numerical representation of women and men in the workplace.

Some scholars critiqued Kanter’s work for relying exclusively on numbers in trying to account for the complexities of gender dynamics in the workplace (Acker, 1990; Yoder, 1991). In her theory of gendered organizations, Acker (1990) argued that gender is entrenched in organizational practices, processes and symbols (e.g. division of labour, organizational culture, construction of sexuality). While the ‘gender-in-organizations’ perspective discussed above was particularly concerned with examining how organizational structures create different experiences for men and women, the ‘gendered organizations’ perspective sees gender as embedded in the very logic and structure of organizations:

‘To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine.’ (p. 149)

From this perspective, gender becomes a social institution (Lorber, 1994), in that it defines patterns of expectations and roles for men and women in the workplace and beyond. More critical approaches in this vein have shifted from conceptualizing gender as an identity (an individual-level phenomenon), to conceptualizing gender as a process (a relational and organizational-level phenomenon). West and Zimmerman (1991) draw attention to social interactions through which gender orders are produced and reinforced in the workplace, suggesting that 'doing gender' is both an outcome and a rationale for social and organizational arrangements:

‘Doing gender involves a complex of socially-guided perceptual, interactional and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine “natures.”’ (p. 62-63)

For the purposes of the current thesis, the critical idea stemming from this field of gender theorizing is that power and gender are inextricably linked and embedded in organizational structures and processes. Therefore, any exercise of power – formal or informal – is bound to be shaped by and to impact established gender orders within organizations. Making a similar argument, Mackenzie Davey (2008) draws parallels between gendering processes and organizational politics in particular, suggesting that both of them concern power structures and are defined by ambiguity and informality.

In conclusion, extant research in the field of organizational politics provides little insight into how gender comes into play in individuals' experiences with politics. There are only two empirical studies focusing exclusively on gender and politics (Mainiero, 1994; Mackenzie Davey, 2008) and none of these draws on the literature in the field of organizational politics. Mainstream research on politics has largely ignored the issue of gender, thus making a tacit assumption that organizational politics are a gender-free phenomenon. However, extant research and theorizing in the broader field of gender in management suggests that such an assumption is unwarranted, given that gender and power are intertwined in organizations.

2.4 Conclusion and scope of inquiry

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides a wealth of insights into individuals' experiences with organizational politics. Of primary interest was to examine organizational politics in managerial roles or from the perspective of managers. A subsidiary interest was to make gender visible when examining politics from a managerial perspective. This chapter established the prevalence and the importance of organizational politics in managerial roles (section 2.3.1). It also indicated that while perceptions of politics in the workplace (as measured with the POPS) tend to have negative outcomes for employees in general, managers tend to perceive organizational politics as inevitable and sometimes even useful (section 2.3.2), although female managers tend to express more reluctance toward engaging in politics (section 2.3.6). In terms of actual political engagement, the extant research highlighted a wide range of political behaviours employed by managers, ranging from more pro-social or collaborative to more anti-social or ruthless (section 2.3.4). More importantly however, scholars have pointed out that critical for the effectiveness of political behaviours is managers' political skill (section 2.3.5). Finally, a range of studies attempted to explain what drives individuals/managers to engage in politics by focusing on antecedents of political behaviours, and particularly on dispositional antecedents (section 2.3.3). The literature review also revealed that gender has been largely ignored in extant research on organizational politics, although scholarly work in the broader field of gender in management suggests that there is a structural gender disadvantage in informal power dynamics in the workplace (section 2.3.6).

In all, the literature review highlighted a number of issues particularly relevant to understanding managerial political engagement. The overarching idea emerging from the literature is that two elements are critical in understanding how managers successfully navigate organizational politics: (a) what managers actually do when they engage in politics and (b) what drives or shapes their political engagement. This dual emphasis on willingness to engage in politics and ability to do so echoes Mintzberg's (1993) argument that effective political

actors must display both will and skill. A striking feature of the literature on politics is the relative neglect of gender, pointing to a need to make gender visible and voiced when researching managerial engagement in organizational politics. Pertaining to these specific aspects, I discuss below how a number of observations about the shortcomings and research gaps of extant literature (Alvesson and Sanderberg, 2011) led to the formulation of my research questions. While I formulate these observations around key theoretical issues in the area of politics, the need to make gender visible is underscored across all three themes.

Political will as an antecedent to political engagement

Seeking predictors of political engagement, scholars have particularly focused on dispositional factors such as need for power, need for achievement, locus of control, intrinsic motivation, Machiavellianism, affability, active influence or risk-seeking propensity, all found to be positively related to political behaviours (section 2.2.3). However, dispositional approaches in organizational research were deemed conceptually and methodologically flawed due to their inability to account for how organizational context may shape the expression of individual dispositions (Davis-Blake and Pfeffer, 1989). In other words, the fact that an individual may have high Need for Power does not say much about the extent to which organizational circumstances will shape the manifestation of that need. A second shortcoming of dispositional approaches in investigating political engagement lies in their generic nature. The dispositional factors discussed in previous sections are indicative of individuals' generic appetite for power and success, but are ill-suited to provide insight into how prone individuals are to engage in organizational politics as a specific form of power and influence.

Attempting to address these shortcomings, I suggest that the propensity to engage in politics can be more accurately examined by better understanding the notion of political will. Up to date, the only empirical study utilizing this construct (Treadway et al., 2005) has defined and measured political will by resorting to dispositional measures (need for achievement and intrinsic motivation). In order to overcome the shortcomings of dispositional approaches,

I propose that political will can be better grasped by exploring managers' specific attitudes toward organizational politics and toward engaging in politics. In defining *political will as managerial attitudes toward politics and engagement in politics*, the focus is shifted from generic dispositional factors to personal attitudes and subjective experience specifically related to organizational politics. In their process model of organizational politics, Vredenburg and Maurer (1984) argued that one dimension of political behaviours is the actual decision of pursuing goals politically. This conceptualization of political will encapsulates attitudinal and volitional elements when attempting to explain what drives managers to engage in politics.

Attitudes are generally defined as evaluations of an object ranging from positive to negative (Fabrigar, MacDonald and Wegener, 2005). As psychological tendencies, attitudes have typically been investigated by measuring the degree of favour or disfavour individuals express while evaluating specific objects (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). What distinguishes attitudes from other dispositional factors is the fact that attitudes can be inferred only when a specific stimulus - denoting the attitude object - triggers the responses having some degree of favourability or unfavourability. Organizational politics is very likely to constitute a distinct attitudinal object for managers since it is a core element of organizational life and managerial responsibilities. As indicated in section 2.2.2, extant research into managerial perceptions of organizational politics was generally conducted by asking managers about their perceptions and beliefs related to politics as a by-product of organizational life. In addition to yielding mixed results, these studies have generally neglected the role of gender. *Therefore, there is need for a closer look into male and female managers' attitudes toward organizational politics.*

In addition, drawing on psychological evidence pertaining to attitude-behaviour inconsistencies (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005) one might suggest that managers' attitudes toward their role as political actors might be more predictive of their behaviour than their attitudes toward organizational politics in general. Very few studies have actually investigated managers' views on their personal

engagement in politics. In effect, Gandz and Murray (1980) even recommended an unobtrusive approach to investigating politics, 'by asking respondents to report not on their own involvement, but on the behaviours of others which they would term political' (p. 250). Unfortunately, such an approach provides limited understanding into how managers view, experience and make sense of their own involvement in politics. *Thus, there is a need for a more in-depth examination into managers' attitudes toward their personal involvement in politics.* This could be particularly fruitful in unpacking gender differences in managers' approach to politics. There is evidence that women – especially those in senior managerial roles – can develop or display political skill (Mainiero, 1994; Hartley et al., 2007). However, Buchanan (2008) found that while both male and female managers deemed politics important in managerial roles, female managers declared themselves less ready to engage in aggressive political behaviours. This hints to the importance of better understanding managers' attitudes toward their own involvement in politics, and gender differences in this respect. Echoing the same idea, Arroba and James (1988) advised that women can become wise political players, but need to rethink their negative position toward politics.

Political skill as critical to effective political engagement

While there is a relative consensus about the importance of political skill in managerial roles, researchers have proposed various models of political skill, reviewed in section 2.3.5. Two political skill frameworks supported by empirical data are those by Ferris et al. (2002, 2007) and Hartley et al. (2007). There are overlaps, but also differences in the dimensions of political skill proposed by these frameworks. This may be explained by the fact that the PSI developed by Ferris and collaborators attempts to capture political skill among employees at all levels, and has not been developed for managers in particular. By contrast, Hartley and collaborators have only used senior managerial samples in their studies. This may explain their observation that male and female managers displayed similar levels of political skill. Their finding is however at odds with studies pointing out gender differences in political engagement preferences

(Buchanan, 2008; Mackenzie-Davey, 2008). There are therefore pending questions regarding *the dimensionality of political skill and the impact of gender when ascertaining managers' political skill*.

Development in the political arena

One striking feature of most of the literature on organizational politics is the lack of a developmental perspective. Political skill is touted as a core skill for managers and leaders. Yet most of the research in the field has been concerned with examining the consequences of having or lacking political skill, without devoting attention to better understanding why and how individuals end up being politically skilled. To the best of my knowledge only two pieces of work have so far examined what factors shape individuals' political skill, pointing out experiential learning, coaching, mentoring (Hartley, 2009; Ferris et al., 2002). However, these provide an indication of *what* may drive the development of political skill. There has been no commentary about *how* exactly this development unfolds for managers. In other words, how does one progress from being unskilled to being effective in developing networks and building alliances? With the exception of Baddeley and James (1984), research has conceptualized political skill only as an end state: in other words, by spelling out what being politically skilled entails, but without examining too closely the lack or the development of political skill.

Mainiero (1994) demonstrated the importance of political seasoning for top female executives, suggesting that women progress from naive to astute politicians. However, although her study identified political seasoning incidents as critical to executive development, the aim of the study was not to examine the nature and the dynamics of political maturation. In addition, given the female-only sample used, it is unclear how such a process would unfold for male managers. The literature review indicated however that both perceptions of politics and engagement in politics tend to vary depending on managerial seniority (sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.3). This suggests that managers' development in the political arena may entail not only changes in their behaviour/skill, but also changes in their views or attitudes toward politics. Drawing on the above

discussed distinction between skill and will, this evidence indicates *a need for deeper insight into how male and female managers develop political will and skill.*

As a consequence of the literature reviewed and based on the shortcomings and research gaps identified above, the following research questions have been addressed in this doctoral project:

RQ1: What attitudes toward organizational politics and engagement in politics comprise political will for male and female managers?

RQ2: What does skilled political engagement entail for male and female managers?

RQ3: How do political will and skill develop for male and female managers?

Therefore, this thesis primarily aims to make a contribution to the field of organizational politics, by examining managers' experiences with politics from the lens of political will, skill and their maturation. A subsidiary interest of the thesis consists in making gender visible when examining managers' experiences with politics. In doing so, the thesis does not intend to contribute to research on gender in management, but rather draws on this body of literature as an analytical lens to understand the role of gender in managers' experience with politics. In the next chapter of the thesis, I will explain how the empirical study was set up in order to address these research questions. I specifically discuss the philosophical perspective underpinning the study, the fieldwork conducted and the methodology employed for data collection and data analysis.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have introduced the research issue, discussing it in the context of extant literature and formulating a specific research question. This chapter explicates how the research question raised was investigated by the doctoral project. The chapter has four objectives. First, section 3.2 discusses the critical realist philosophical perspective underpinning the current research. Second, section 3.3 proposes a qualitative research design aligned with the philosophical perspective outlined and with the research issue addressed. Third, section 3.4 describes the steps undertaken in the fieldwork conducted, including the sample choice and the data collection process. Fourth, a detailed account of the data analysis process is presented in section 3.5. The chapter is then summarized in section 3.6.

3.2 Philosophical approach

The choice of a research strategy involves more than stating a preference for a specific data collection method; it requires an examination of the underpinning epistemological assumptions (Tuchman, 1994). As a general rule, every piece of research needs to rely on the alignment of three major elements: ontology, epistemology and methodology. While ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, epistemology refers to ways of knowing this reality and generating knowledge about it. Blaikie (1993, p.6) defines ontology as:

‘the claims or assumptions that a particular approach to social enquiry makes about the nature of social reality – claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other.’

From a researcher’s perspective, it is essential to examine assumptions about ‘what is’ in order to ascertain ‘what can be known’. Ultimately, the role of a

philosophy of science is to inform the practice of science by allowing researchers to establish coherent criteria for assessing the plausibility of their research design choices and the nature of the claims they make about the knowledge generated. Indeed, attempting to define epistemology, Blaikie (1993, p. 7) describes it as:

‘the claims or assumptions made about the ways in which it is possible to gain knowledge of this reality, whatever it is understood to be; claims about how what exists may be known.’

There are competing approaches to social research based on the philosophical assumptions about the nature of social reality and the role of science in understanding this reality. Given the necessity to acknowledge and reflect on one’s personal ontological assumptions and epistemological commitments as a researcher (Cassell and Symon, 2004), in the next sections of this chapter I will provide an overview of approaches pertaining to the philosophy of science and then discuss in more detail the critical realist philosophical perspective informing the current study.

3.2.1 From positivism to interpretivism

Ontological and epistemological approaches to social inquiry range from positivism to interpretivism, depending on the emphasis they place on the idea of objectivity and truth versus interpretation and social construction in investigating social situations. Ontologically speaking, the objective end of the spectrum claims that reality exists independent of human consciousness and involvement, while the subjective extreme posits that it is human subjectivity itself that generates reality (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). These distinct ontological positions are usually linked to particular epistemologies that vary in the extent to which they see knowledge produced by social research as objective, accurate or able to convey reality, thus creating communities of research traditionally described as ‘positivist’ and ‘interpretivist’. A summary of these contrasting philosophical perspectives is presented in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1 Contrasting philosophical perspectives in social science

	Positivism	Interpretivism
Reality	Objective, separated from the individual, to be discovered	Subjective, (co-)constructed by individuals
Aim of research	Explaining, predicting reality	Exploring subjective interpretations/constructions
Researcher	Detached, impartial, neutral, producing value-free science	Part of the reality being researched, aware of his/her own subjectivity
Research design	Large samples, quantitative methods, deductive logic, statistical generalization	Small samples, qualitative methods, inductive logic, theoretical abstraction
Respondents/participants	Confirm/disconfirm pre-existing frameworks or theories about social phenomena by providing close-ended responses	Open-ended qualitative accounts play key role in revealing and exploring individual meanings about social phenomena

Based on: Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002; Silverman, 1993

From a positivist perspective, reality is objective, external and independent of the observer. The epistemological mission of research is to identify the laws governing a fairly ordered reality, in a reductionist and deterministic manner, with the aim of predicting how this reality unfolds (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Therefore, positivism seeks to produce 'objective' knowledge that conveys the causal mechanisms and the regularities of the social world. Methodological choices in this tradition are shaped by an endeavour to operationalize concepts, isolate variables and employ large samples which allow for statistical generalization.

A common critique of positivism relates to its 'naive realist' claim to produce knowledge that captures reality with accuracy, in a generalizable and context-free form (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). A plethora of post-positivists have

challenged the reducibility of ontology (the being) to epistemology (the knowing). Offering a competing philosophical perspective, interpretivism claims that insight into the social world can only be gained by tapping into individual and collective meanings and sees knowledge as being the product of social conventions to which scholarly communities adhere (Astley, 2005). As one of the most prominent approaches under this umbrella, social constructionism posits that reality is socially-constructed and therefore has multiple facets; meaning is not a fixed entity to be discovered by the researcher, but rather a negotiated process (Schwandt, 2003). The epistemological aim of research is to account for this social construction of reality, by acknowledging that the researcher is part of the very reality being researched (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Underpinning methodological choices in this tradition is the attempt to explore, understand or even emancipate. The emphasis is on small sample qualitative approaches, which allow for individual and collective constructions to be elicited.

3.2.2 Critical realism

A philosophical perspective which reconciles what may appear to be mutually exclusive assumptions of the two extremes presented above is critical realism. The term 'critical realism' became gradually established by the interchangeable use of 'transcendental realism' and 'critical naturalism' – both conveying philosophical positions that emerged as a vigorous criticism of an enduring positivistic view of science (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson and Norrie, 1998). Essentially, critical realism draws on ontological realism and epistemological relativism in formulating its philosophical claims. A realist ontology is objectivist in that it assumes the existence of a reality independent of human awareness. Critical realism claims that reality is multi-layered and describes three domains of reality: the empirical, the actual and the real (Bhaskar, 1978). The empirical domain refers to the surface level of reality we can access and perceive with our senses. The actual contains events whose existence is granted regardless of whether they can be observed or not. Finally, the real is underpinned by invisible structures and laws at the real level and by causal mechanisms at the

actual level. Commenting on this partial overlap between what can be observed and what is, Sayer (2000, p.12) explains that 'observability may make us more confident about what we think exists, but existence itself is not dependent on it.'

While positivists seem to imply that external reality operates upon individuals from outside and interpretivists suggest that reality is constructed by individuals from inside, realists postulate that individuals are faced with a pre-structured reality which they can partially alter with their subject interpretations and actions. Critical realists see the positivistic approach to social research as being too decontextualized and oblivious to the personal meanings and interpretations of the very individuals or groups researched. At the same time, they consider the extreme interpretivist stance too subjective and relativist (Neuman, 2006).

Table 3-2 Key tenets of Critical Realism

Tenet	Description
Stratified ontology	Reality is constituted by three domains: the empirical (direct experience), the actual (experience and unobservable events) and the real (invisible structural mechanisms).
Generative mechanisms	Structural mechanisms and processes located at the deepest ontological level ('the real'), generating the events which are observable or not ('the empirical' and 'the actual')
The transitive-intransitive dimensions of knowledge	Transitive – artificial concepts, constructed as referent to the world. Intransitive – the world referred to.
Retroduction	The process by which underlying processes and mechanisms of reality are identified by iteratively confronting theoretical models with empirical data.
Epistemological relativism	Acknowledgement that knowledge and research are shaped by historical and cultural factors, therefore fallible.
Judgemental Rationality	Scientific development is based on rational choice between competing explanations/theories about the world.

Based on: Al-Amoudi and Willmont, 2011; Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson and Norrie, 1998

Critical realism solves the epistemological tension between objectivism and subjectivism by drawing a distinction between reality itself (intransitive objects of science) and the tools for explaining reality (transitive science) (Blaikie, 1993). The purpose of science is to ensure that transitive statements approximate as closely as possible the intransitive objects of science. Consequential to this distinction is the refusal among critical realists to view knowledge as reducible to reality and vice versa by exposing these erroneous assumptions as epistemic and ontic fallacies (Bhaskar, 1978). Considering the three domains of reality previously mentioned, from a critical realist stance, the purpose of research and theoretical models is to enable the epistemic journey from the surface level of empirical facts toward the deeper level of underlying mechanisms.

Critical realists do not reject the idea of causality (Collier, 1994) but have a more nuanced understanding of it. They challenge the empiricist Humean view that causation is equivalent to constantly observing conjunctures of visible events on the grounds that this conception neglects deeper structural mechanisms. Instead, the emphasis is on the causal relationship between events and their generative mechanism (Pawson, 1989, in Tsang and Kwan, 1999). Unlike natural systems, social systems are far too complex and open to allow for a robust and discernable manifestation of cause-and-effect relationships (Sayer, 2000); instead, critical realists are concerned with demi-regularities (Lawson, 1998) or patterns of events seen as manifestations of real structures. According to Harre (1970, p.125), 'scientific explanation consists in finding or imagining plausible generative mechanisms for the patterns amongst events.'

Acknowledging that social structures are less stable and enduring than other natural structures that make the object of scientific inquiry, critical realists posit that it is impossible to isolate invariable causal laws that allow for meticulous prediction within social systems. However, the inability to predict does not preclude the usefulness of explanations and therefore the scientific concern of critical realism is not with prediction, but with description and explanation (Tsang and Kwan, 1999).

While critical realists are interested in theoretical models that explain the empirical patterns of reality and approximate its generative mechanisms, they also acknowledge that human knowledge produced to explain these patterns is contextually and historically determined, and therefore fallible. Knowledge production is an imperfect and partially subjective process and does not rely on inductive (data to theory) or deductive reasoning (theory to data), but on a retroductive research strategy whereby the underlying processes and mechanisms of the social world are elicited by iteratively confronting theoretical models with empirical data (Archer et al., 1998, p. 164). In other words, our access to reality is conceptually-mediated (Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen and Karlsson, 2002). While acknowledging the fallibility of knowledge, critical realists do not espouse the radical relativistic view that no general knowledge or truth is possible. Not all knowledge is equally fallible; assuming this reduces any scientific endeavour to a discursive exercise. Theories and explanations are therefore only provisionally accepted. Critical testing of theories is underpinned by judgemental rationality which entails assessment of how plausible or accurate different explanations are in accounting for reality. Scientific progress does not entail confirmation of universal laws that account for empirical regularities, but requires exploration and account of how generative mechanisms apply in particular contexts and 'repeated movement between concrete and abstract, and between empirical cases and general theory' (Sayer, 2000, p. 23).

3.2.2.1 Critical realism and methodological choices

Although critical realism is a philosophical perspective increasingly adopted in management organization studies (Al-Amoudi and Willmont, 2011), some scholars have lamented the relative neglect of the methodological implications that these ontological and epistemological tenets (Healy and Perry, 2000; Danermark et al., 2002). Johnson and Duberley (2000) note that realism in general does not necessarily reject the methods of positivism per se, but rather the absolutist assumption that these are the only legitimate ways of knowing reality, which is incompatible with the epistemological relativism assumed by

critical realists. A critical realist philosophical stance does not entail commitment to specific research methods. In effect, due to its stratified ontology, critical realism allows for choice between qualitative and quantitative methods, or a combination of those, given that both methodological approaches are seen as tools for examining the generative mechanisms which yield observable events (Danermark et al., 2002). From a critical realist perspective, the adequacy of a research method hinges mainly on its ability to enable the leap from observable facts to generative mechanisms. Since these mechanisms are only contingently related to observable events, scientific understanding also requires accounting for the context in which these mechanisms might operate.

Johnson, Buehring, Cassell and Symon (2006) argued the need for a 'contingent criteriology' in order to assess qualitative research in management studies, suggesting that methodological preferences must be aligned with philosophical assumptions underpinning the research. Focusing specifically on critical realism, Healy and Perry (2000) proposed criteria for making methodological choices compatible with this philosophical perspective. Drawing on the observations of these authors, as well as on the above discussion regarding the key tenets of critical realism, I have identified a number of principles as relevant in guiding methodological choices for the doctoral project and clarifying its epistemic claims.

First, a critical realist approach is primarily concerned with identifying generative mechanisms. For this purpose, the researcher must observe empirical regularities in the phenomena investigated and make theoretically-informed assumptions about the deeper causes generating these regularities. Subjective meanings are considered important but insufficient for this purpose. Therefore, in the current project, it is important to explore and identify patterns of subjective meanings and experiences related to organizational politics, willingness and ability to engage in politics, as well as development in the political arena. In addition, tapping into the ontological depth of critical realism entails more than identifying patterns in participants' meanings; it requires employing analytical abstraction to account for the generative mechanisms which may explain these

patterns. As a result, the study should be able to explain how these generative mechanisms produced the empirical patterns observed, on the sample of managers utilized, in the specific context chosen. Because critical realists are concerned with explanation, and not prediction, the study should not aim to produce findings which can be statistically generalized.

Second, critical realism calls for a methodology which treats social systems as open systems, and is able to capture subjective meanings as well as contextual factors. Critical realism remains mindful of the fallibility of knowledge and its situated nature. Research in this tradition does not claim to be objective or impartial, but endeavours to be value-aware, robust, transparent and trustworthy (Patton, 2002).

3.2.3 Philosophical stances in the field of organizational politics

Although essential in shaping methodological decisions and claims about the knowledge produced, philosophical perspectives underpinning research published in peer-reviewed academic journals are rarely made explicit. Alvesson and Sandberg (2011, p. 247) notice that ‘the assumptions underlying existing literature for the most part remain unchallenged remain unquestioned in the formulation of research questions’. In order to ensure that the current doctoral project was intellectually coherent in its claims and positioning, it became important to examine my personal philosophical commitments not only in isolation, but in conjuncture with philosophical perspectives underpinning extant empirical research in the areas of literature I engage with. The review of literature discussed in Chapter 2 suggests that most empirical research conducted on the topic of organizational politics is underpinned by a positivistic perspective. Indicative of these implicit ontological and epistemological commitments are a few defining features of this literature:

- A preference for large-scale studies, employing quantitative methods and allowing for statistical generalization. For instance, the POPS model is concerned with identifying the antecedents, mediators and

consequences that perceptions of politics have at an individual and organizational level.

- The use of a theoretically-informed, deductive approach in order to propose tightly defined constructs and to develop instruments (questionnaires) pertaining to various aspects of organizational politics (perceptions of politics, political skill). Once defined/developed, concepts are 'brought' to respondents by the researcher and then subject to refinement through validation studies of the inventories in cause.
- A widely shared view, inferred from authors' suggestions for further research, that theoretical development of the field will be accomplished through additional large-scale quantitative studies that would either refine and extend the use of existing models and inventories or create new ones.

Illustrating one exception from this mainstream approach, Buchanan (1999; 2008) adopts a different philosophical stance in investigating managers' experience with organizational politics. Tackling the long-standing problem of defining politics and political behaviour in organizations, he suggests that scholarly endeavour to establish definitions and clarify concepts related to politics is inconsequential from a constructivist-interpretivist perspective, and argues that 'the definitions and assessments that matter are those of organizational members'. Buchanan explains that from a constructivist perspective 'measures of ambiguous and socially constructed phenomena, such as organization politics, are invariably unstable'. He also stresses the importance of understanding political behaviour from the perspective of individuals initiating it – the emphasis being on the subjective, unique 'logic of political action' rather than on generalizable causal models of political behaviour (Buchanan, 1999). In another example of interpretivist work in the field, MacKinzie Davey explores how nine female business graduates constructed organizational politics as masculine. She argues that although accounts of organizational politics elicited by various studies or streams of research may

share communalities that 'make generalization seductive, it is not clear what these achieve'. Both Buchanan and Mackenzie Davey's work share a preference for rich, qualitative methods which allow the exploration of individual meanings, and a lack of concern with generalizing the findings. This approach is therefore visibly distinct from the positivistic mainstream perspective outlined above.

Underpinned by a critical realist perspective, the current study sits in many ways at the crossroad between these two opposite philosophical approaches in the field of organizational politics, and their corresponding research practices. This translates in the following assumptions/observations:

- Organizational politics are assumed to be real and not socially constructed -- despite academic debate around the definition of the concept and inconsistencies in the lay use of the term. Organizations are political arenas, where individuals and groups engage in informal influence processes to defend competing interests. Variations in how individuals or scholars comprehend and label this side of organizational life make no less real its existence and consequences (ranging from budget allocation across functional departments to differential career progression patterns).
- Individual, subjective meanings and experiences are important in researching organizational politics, particularly because they are informative of managers' involvement in politics. My mission as a critical realist researcher is not only to explore and report individual constructions of these concepts, but to seek patterns in these individual accounts and discuss what potential deeper mechanisms may account for these patterns, thus employing analytical abstraction (Danermark et al., 2002). The current study is not inductive, nor deductive, but retroductive. This entails a movement between concrete and abstract by confronting empirical data (individual accounts) with theoretical concepts and models in the field. This is in contrast to mainstream positivist approaches in the field, which examined managerial involvement in

politics by employing a deductive logic. For example, in order to develop the PSI, Ferris and colleagues (2000; 2007) set out by proposing theoretically-informed dimensions of political skill, which were subsequently tested in multiple large-scale studies. While such an inventory is internally coherent, it is difficult to ascertain whether there are perhaps aspects of political skill relevant to or enacted by managers, which have not been explored.

- In the current study, the use of concepts such as organizational politics, political will and political skill is inevitably historically-bound. In setting up this research project and formulating my research questions, I have been constrained by contemporary understanding of organizational and extant scholarly research in the field. Without doubt, I also brought a degree of subjectivity in conducting the study and analyzing the data. As a researcher, I must be value-aware and display reflexivity. Additional commentary on this aspect will be included in the Discussion chapter.
- Knowledge in general, and the findings of the current study in particular, are not viewed as universal, context-free laws. The overarching aim is to illuminate some of the deeper mechanisms and structures that may account for managers' different involvement in politics across gender lines. The role of context is acknowledged, not merely to 'neutralize' its impact on the findings, but rather to understand it as a mechanism that potentially shapes managers' political will and skill.
- Aligned with a critical realist perspective (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 63; New, 2004), gender is considered important not only as a categorical variable which divides managers into two groups according to sex, but also from the perspective of social meanings, norms, practices dictated by these sex differences, which create gender orders.

In this chapter, I presented so far the critical realist philosophical stance underpinning the current research. Critical realism is distinct among various philosophical perspectives discussed in that it presumes the existence of an

external reality, while acknowledging at the same time the imperfect ability of science to tap into this reality. Further on, I explored the various epistemic claims following from distinct philosophical commitments, discussing this as applied to research in the field of organizational politics in general and to the current research in particular. With regards to methodology, a qualitative approach is seen as compatible with the assumptions of critical realism and with the research questions raised. In the next section I will discuss additional considerations relevant to the choice of a qualitative research design.

3.3 Research design: A case for qualitative approach

In addition to the ontological and epistemological considerations discussed above, there are other factors that determine the choice of a research method. In this section I will explain the choice of a qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews by discussing three key methodological issues: methodological fit, variance versus process and the role of context.

3.3.1 Methodological fit

Edmondson and McManus (2007) use the concept of 'methodological fit' to stress the importance of linking methodological choices to the type of research question formulated and to prior work in the field one wishes to contribute to. They describe three stages defining the state of prior theory and research (nascent, intermediate or mature) and determining the adequacy of a research strategy (see Table 3-3). This taxonomy demonstrates the adequacy of an exploratory methodology for the current study, in light of the research gaps identified and the research questions formulated.

Table 3-3 Methodological fit in field research

	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
Research questions	Open-ended inquiry about a phenomenon of interest	Proposed relationships between new and established constructs	Focused questions and/or hypotheses relating existing constructs
Data collection	Qualitative, open-ended	Hybrid (both qualitative and quantitative)	Quantitative data; focused measures
Constructs and measures	Typically new constructs, few formal measures	One or more new constructs and/or new measures	Extensive use of existing constructs and measures
Data analysis goal	Pattern identification	Preliminary or exploratory testing of new propositions/constructs	Formal hypothesis testing
Data analysis method	Thematic content analysis coding for evidence of constructs	Content analysis, exploratory statistics, and preliminary tests	Statistical inference, standard statistical analyses
Theoretical contribution	A suggestive theory, further work needed on issues opened up by the study	A provisional theory, often integrating previously separate bodies of work	A supported theory adding specificity (new mechanisms/boundaries) to existing theories

Based on: Edmonson and McManus, 2007

First, it must be noticed that although several streams of research in the field of organizational politics could be described as mature according to this taxonomy (for example, the POPS model), investigating political will by exploring attitudes toward organizational politics can be described to a great extent as a nascent sub-field of research. In line with Buchanan's (1999) call for more qualitative inquiry into politics, an exploratory qualitative approach was deemed suitable to map out the conceptual boundaries of political will (Neuman, 2006). Second, the developmental angle on political will and skill is equally novel and calls for a qualitative exploratory approach. The table above also gives an indication of the

nature and the aims of the data analysis depending on the maturity of the research area one contributes to. This will be addressed in further sections of this chapter.

3.3.2 Variance versus process

A process perspective is also useful in unpacking developmental aspects related political will and political skill. Drawing a distinction between variance and process theory, Van de Ven (2007) indicates that variance methods are outcome-driven and seek explanations of change by examining causation in terms of independent variables acting on dependent ones, whilst process models are event-driven and examine change by taking into account temporally dispersed events. In a variance approach, explanatory power depends upon generalizability or the ease with which one can apply the models proposed to a range of contexts, whilst in a process approach, explanatory power depends upon the versatility of the model proposed or the degree to which the model can account for developmental patterns. From a methodological perspective, process research calls for a qualitative approach while examining temporally evolving phenomena (Langley, 2009). For instance, a variance approach of political will would require identifying its key dimensions, testing for how characteristic these are for broader samples and perhaps linking them to certain antecedents and outcomes related to managerial roles (i.e. performance, reputation). A process model of political will and skill aims to examine how these develop and unfold in time and what factors account for its evolution. As a specific qualitative method of data collection, interviews were chosen in particular because they are temporally versatile and allow participants to reflect back on their experience with politics and the changes in political will and skill.

3.3.3 Context

Finally, qualitative approaches also have the benefit of eliciting contextual and rich data about social settings and processes. Given that politics are by definition contextual, this was particularly relevant for the current study. In addition, the literature review indicated that lack of attention to context is a

common shortcoming of extant research in the field. Interviews allowed discussion around the organizational culture of the companies where data collection took place and the impact of organizational culture on politics. Short of a qualitative approach, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to gather meaningful information about the contextual nature of politics as experienced by participants.

In summary, a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was considered appropriate for the aims of the current study. Prior to implementing the research design and starting the data collection process in the organizations of choice, I tested out the interview protocol by conducting two pilot interviews with Cranfield MBA students (who had previous managerial experience). The feedback received about their interview experience was instrumental in positioning the project and framing some of the questions further on.

3.4 Fieldwork

3.4.1 Organizations and participants

The study was conducted sequentially in two global organizations – Semcom and Bevcorp². Overall, I interviewed 38 managers in both companies (14 in Semcom and 24 in Bevcorp). The first organization, Semcom, is a semi-conductor company in the hi-tech sector, while the second one, Bevcorp, is a beverages company in the fast consumer goods sector. Given that the unit of analysis was the individual, the corporate context was not the prime criterion for selecting the sample. In other words, it was not the purpose of this study to explore the nature of organizational politics in a hi-tech or a fast consumer goods company or to make comparisons between companies or sectors, with a case study approach. The aim was to explore individual experiences and views around politics as required by the research question. Nevertheless, given the highly contextual nature of politics, the organizational setting was considered essential in facilitating a situated understanding of participants' accounts. In

² For confidentiality reasons, pseudonyms will be used to refer to these organizations.

further sections of the thesis, this will be attended to by discussing the organizational cultures characterizing these two companies and impacting organizational politics. The findings will be also contextualized when necessary. With regards to gender demographics, it is worth mentioning at this point that the proportion of women in managerial roles was slightly different in the two companies, namely approximately 30% in Bevcorp, compared to about 20% in Semcom. Both companies had policies and initiatives related to gender diversity.

Buchanan and Bryman (2009) make a compelling case for a contextual understanding of methods choice in organizational research, arguing that in addition to research aims and epistemological concerns, methodological choices are shaped by inevitable contextual (organizational and political) influences such as negotiated objective, layered permissions and stakeholder demands. They also suggest that research competence entails a coherent account of these influences, rather than treating them as problems to be overcome. In line with this argument, it is acknowledged that choice and access to these specific organizations was facilitated by existing corporate partnerships within Cranfield's International Centre for Women Leaders. This was in fact a crucial enabler in implementing the research project, given the sensitive nature of the research topic. The unique challenges of conducting field work on topics related to organizational politics have already been documented (Buchanan, 1999; Riley, 1983), with some authors going as far as suggesting that researchers should disguise interest in politics by using less controversial terms (Madison et al., 1980; Prasad and Rubenstein, 1992). For ethical and conceptual reasons, it was deemed important to be transparent about the nature and the aim of the project with the organizational stakeholders (including participants). Before starting the data collection, the aim, the process and the outcomes of the project were thoroughly discussed with key stakeholders in both companies, particularly in order to provide reassurance about anonymity and confidentiality.

Given the qualitative nature of the study, the size and nature of the sample was not meant to enable statistical or numerical generalization, but rather theoretical generalization (Flick, 2005). This is consistent with the goal of exploring relatively new constructs and contributing to a moderately developed stream of research. Selection of and access to specific participants along these lines was enabled by the key contact persons within each company – typically individuals involved in corporate diversity networks, but holding roles across various departments (for example Tax and Marketing). The selection of the participants was purposive (Silverman, 2006), aiming to tap into diverse perspectives regarding the phenomenon of interest, particularly in terms of gender, seniority and functional role. Overall, I interviewed 38 managers, among which 18 males and 20 females. A gender-mixed sample was deemed particularly important given the research interest and the dearth of empirically-supported studies of gender and politics in the extant literature. Table 3-4 below provides a break-down of the sample by gender and company.

Table 3-4 Sample break-down by gender

	Male	Female	Total
Semcom	5	9	14
Bevcorp	13	11	24
Total	18	20	38

Further on, tenure or seniority was found to be an indicator of temporal changes in behaviours and attitudes (McGrath, 1988), which was particularly relevant in order to capture development of political will and skill. Seniority was assessed based on participants' job grade and job title, and supported by their personal description of their role. Given that the job grade system differed in the two companies, and for confidentiality purposes, I grouped the participants into three levels of seniority: junior manager, middle manager and senior manager.

Table 3-5 Sample break-down by seniority

	Junior Manager	Middle Manager	Senior Manager	Total
Semcom	3	4	7	14
Bevcorp	3	14	7	24
Total	6	18	14	38

Rather than being a strict classification, these categories convey a continuum in terms of seniority. The middle management category in particular encompasses the broadest range of managerial levels and responsibilities. A more detailed break-down of the sample in terms of seniority is provided in Table 3-5. In addition, Table 3-6 below provides a break-down of the sample by gender and seniority.

Table 3-6 Sample break-down by gender and seniority

	Junior Manager	Middle Manager	Senior Manager	Total
Female	4	10	6	20
Male	2	8	8	18
Total	6	18	14	38

In terms of tenure within their respective companies, all managers had been with Bevcorp or Semcom for at least 5 years, up to more than 20 years. This is partially related to the level of seniority, but it also indicates in itself that participants were well aware of their organizational environment and could comment on it as relevant to politics. While age was to some extent related to levels of seniority, these two variables did not entirely overlap, given that some of the younger participants had higher managerial roles than older ones. Ages within the sample ranged between 27 and 62 years old, with an overall average age of 39.1 (38.3 in Semcom and 39.8 in Bevcorp). The literature review

suggests that seniority, and not necessarily age, is important in understanding views and experiences related to politics. As such, there was not a theoretical rationale for reporting age throughout the findings, but this section discussed age in order to provide a complete picture of the sample. In addition, a specific rationale for not reporting age was also an explicit request in this respect from a few participants who feared that their very young or older age might jeopardize their anonymity.

Diversity in terms of functional role meant that participants held roles in a breadth of departments such as Finance, HR, Sales, Marketing, PR, IT and Supply Chain. For illustration purposes, the following are examples of job titles among the participants interviewed in both companies: Innovation Director, Deputy CFO, Head of Global Tax, Country Manager, Marketing Director Middle East, Director of Corporate Communication, Training Development Manager, Local Market Development Manager, Sales Assistant Manager. Again, this information is provided as a descriptor of the sample. The study did not aim to focus on a specific functional area; consequently the analysis and the discussion will not take this into account.

3.4.2 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method of data collection because they are flexible enough to facilitate exploration of under-examined phenomena or constructs (Oppenheim, 2001). A project brief was circulated to approximately 20 employees in Semcom and 30 employees in Bevcorp. The brief introduced the researcher and explained the purpose and the method of the study. The project was framed as an investigation into managers' views and experiences around organizational politics. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, special care was taken to reassure participants about anonymity and confidentiality, both in the project brief and at the outset of each interview. Participation to the study was voluntary. Conditional upon negotiated access with the corporate partners, the interviews were carried out between June and September 2009 in Semcom and between June and November 2010 in

Bevcorp. Overall, twelve interviews were conducted face-to-face, at the UK headquarters of both companies, and the rest over the phone.

The conceptual approach to data collection and analysis can be broadly mapped onto the seven stages of interviewing described by Kvale (1996): thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. Thematizing and designing are relevant to the data collection stage, as they refer to the alignment between the research question addressed and the interview protocol. The interview questions tapped into broad themes pertaining to participants' views and experiences related to organizational politics and to personal involvement in politics. The interview protocol in Appendix A contains the main questions that have served as a basis for the interviews, as well as examples of probing questions employed. The core questions tapped into several broad themes. First, respondents were asked about their personal understanding of the term 'organizational politics'. In addition to pre-empting the definition challenges exposed in the literature review, this question also allowed me to collect individual meanings and interpretations around the research topic, which from a critical realist perspective are seen as integral elements in understanding and explaining social reality. Second, the interview explored the organizational context and culture potentially shaping the nature of organizational politics and personal experiences with it. This is consistent with the critical realist focus on context-specific generative mechanisms. Third, most of the questions inquired (a) about participants' views or attitudes towards politics and (b) about their actual experiences of engaging in politics and their ability to do so. These questions were key in ascertaining political will as attitudes toward engaging in organizational politics and political skill as competent way of engaging in politics. Fourth, participants were asked if and how their views and approach to politics had changed and what triggered the change.

During the interview, I used the protocol flexibly, endeavouring to remain open to the data, and using probing questions to explore aspects that appeared particularly relevant to participants. As a consequence, some probing questions

took centre stage as the interviews progressed. In order to foster engagement with the topic and to allow for personal reflection, the interview protocol was emailed to participants two days prior the interview. The interviews lasted one hour on average. With only two exceptions (a male and a female interviewee, in Bevcorp and Semcom respectively), all interviewees allowed me to record the interviews. When recording was not possible, I took extensive notes during the interviews and incorporated them in the overall thematic analysis.

3.5 Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, partially by the researcher and partially using a professional transcription service. Individual transcripts were approximately 14 pages on average, amounting to about 500 pages overall. Following transcription, I spent a considerable amount of time simply reading through the transcripts in order to immerse myself in the data. This became critical especially as the sheer volume of data increased with the number of interviews conducted. At this stage, I often wrote down first impressions and observations about the data. The interviews were then systematically analyzed using a template analysis approach (King, 2007), supported by NVivo software (version 9.0), which required inspecting the transcripts repeatedly.

3.5.1 Template analysis: from categorizing to interpreting data

A central activity in the analysis of interview transcripts was coding, which involves aggregating qualitative data into conceptual categories (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Template analysis (King, 2007) is an approach to coding that enables a structured conceptual approach with a looser, emergent interpretation by the flexible use of an evolving template which incorporates the main themes conveyed by the data. Template analysis is a content analysis technique for qualitative research and does not require a certain philosophical perspective. However, King (2007) comments that its use may vary depending on the philosophical perspective. A realist-oriented study would entail, for example, a few a priori codes informed by the areas of literature deemed relevant for the research question addressed.

Using this technique, an initial template was developed based on the main topics tackled during the interview: individual definitions of politics, organizational context, political will (attitudes toward politics), political skill (actual behaviours, engagement) and changes in political will and skill. I started the analysis process by coding the data against the provisional template, through an iteration of interview transcripts. The template was updated as nodes become more abstract and more interpretive rather than purely descriptive (Miles and Huberman, 1994). While I had some a priori nodes, I took special care to avoid the risk of forcing data into existing categories. The updated template was then applied to each new interview transcript, and retrospectively to the transcripts that had been coded previously. This facilitated intensive engagement with the data. Although there is no perfect or final template, I consider that the version employed to report the findings captures reasonably well the richness of the data collected.

The refinement of the template entailed a gradual movement from organizing to interpreting data (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Two analytical steps were critical in this respect: identifying themes (coded as NVivo nodes) which conveyed managers' political will and skill and mapping development along these dimensions and across the themes identified. These steps are described below. It should be mentioned that participants did not use, unless coincidentally, terms such 'political will' and 'political skill'. These terms constitute 'theoretically informed interpretations' (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008) of their views and experiences.

Identifying themes. Themes represent recurrent topics of discussion which capture the main ideas exchanged in an interview (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). Themes allowed me to identify dimensions of political will and skill. For example, when describing their attitudes toward engaging in politics, managers consistently referred to the functional purpose of political engagement, as well as its ethical implications. This led me to categorize quotes along two themes which I considered dimensions of political will: 'functional' and 'ethical'. Dimensionalization also entails identifying properties of the categories or themes extracted, or in other words examining how data vary empirically along

the categories identified (Spiggle, 1994). This meant that once I identified the key themes/dimension, I examined how participants' views varied along these dimensions (i.e. how ethical or useful managers considered politics to be).

Salience of themes surfacing from participants' accounts was established at two levels: interpersonal and intrapersonal. Intrapersonal salience refers to how relevant the theme appeared to be for each participant individually. Several cues were used to establish this: frequency with which the topic was mentioned throughout the interview, degree of detail in the accounts and use of emotionally colourful language when discussing specific topics at length. Interpersonal salience refers to how frequent a specific theme was mentioned by several respondents, therefore how representative it is for the overall sample. When reporting findings, this interpersonal salience will be conveyed by using indicators such as 'all', 'most', 'several', 'some', or 'few' respondents. While the results will often emphasize common patterns of meaning, therefore the most typical themes that emerged, I will also illustrate with quotes atypical or contrasting positions.

Developing the template involved adding new themes, deleting or relabeling themes, or changing the hierarchical structure of themes and sub-themes by using free nodes and tree nodes. The free nodes that emerged from the initial coding were gradually incorporated into tree nodes. In some cases, content that didn't fit into the initial template led to new free nodes, subsequently organized into new tree nodes. For example, in mapping out dimensions of political skill, I initially created several codes such as 'open', 'honest', 'transparent', 'stand for what you believe' and 'be yourself'. Gradually, I realized that all of these pertained to a dimension managers considered essential to skilful political engagement, namely 'authenticity'.

The process of (re)clustering data into tree nodes reflected an increase in the level of abstraction and interpretation. The nodes reflect therefore a movement across various levels of abstraction. I also employed multiple coding, which meant that the same interview excerpt was sometimes catalogued under the multiple nodes, due to its polysemantic nature. For example, the extract below

was coded under three distinct nodes (two pertaining to political will – ‘emotional negative’, ‘functional negative’, and one pertaining to the maturation journey – ‘resistance’):

I think it is an obstacle. I don’t do politics, I can’t do politics, I never could do politics. It makes me cringe. (...) The only thing I guess I would enjoy is stopping it.

Throughout the thematic analysis, the aim was to identify themes and create nodes which are non-redundant and discriminant (Plowman, Baker, Beck, Kulkarni, Solansky and Travis, 2007), and allow for a systematic and comprehensive coverage of the data set (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

Mapping development. The analysis of the interviews also indicated that all respondents described views and experiences related to organizational politics from a developmental perspective. After the first 2-3 interviews, it became evident that the developmental aspect was the overarching frame of reference used by respondents to discuss both their willingness and ability to engage in politics. Respondents spoke at length about changes in their attitudes toward politics and their approach to politics throughout their careers, with time and experience, conveying a persistent idea of growth or political maturation. In a sense, this meta-story was for participants the most salient and personally relevant aspect of their experience with politics. The comments in this vein portrayed willingness and ability to engage in politics as temporally evolving phenomena, allowing me to capture these dynamic aspects through participants’ retrospective accounts (Langley, 2009, p. 414). For this purpose, I sought to think ‘processually’ by focusing not only on stable entities in and across participants’ responses (i.e. recurrent themes conveying dimensions of political will), but also by focusing on change itself (Poole, 2005) (i.e. themes conveying change along the previously identified dimensions of political will). In other words, the kind of questions I asked from the data (Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland, 2004), were not only ‘What conveys managerial political will?’, but also ‘How does political will change?’, ‘What pace, patterns, sequences characterize this change?’, ‘What triggered the change?’. For

instance, one change repeatedly mentioned by participants as key personal learning was to no longer think in 'black and white' terms about politics and to be less hasty and radical in considering political action as invariably 'wrong'. This was specifically related to change in ethical reasoning about politics, so I coded such accounts under the node structure 'political will/ethical/change'. In addition, I also noticed that in discussing their approach to organizational politics, participants described various and evolving styles and mindsets which blended elements of political will and skill (such as 'avoidance', 'resistance' or 'pro-activity'). I created different nodes to capture these.

Changes in willingness and ability to engage in politics seemed to fall into a logical progression, crystallizing into discernable and qualitatively distinct patterns of attitudes and behaviours related to organizational politics. From a process perspective, sequential patterns are critical to explanation (Pentland, 1999). In identifying these patterns, I drew on two distinct sources of evidence: explicit and implicit explanatory accounts (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 253). Explicit accounts refer to developmental changes identified by participants themselves. In other words, every participant was aware of a number of changes that occurred over time in the way they approached politics. Implicit accounts, on the other hand, refer to developmental changes identified by myself, as a researcher, through comparative analysis between individual accounts. This last trail of evidence enabled me to aggregate pieces of data (events, attitudes, behaviours) characterizing managers' journey with politics and to find broader inter-individual patterns with an underlying logic. Thus, by employing implicit and explicit explanatory accounts, I endeavoured to provide a level of explanation that builds on, but transcends actors' interpretations, which is consistent with a critical realist approach (Reed, 2009, p. 444). As a result of this analysis, I identified stages of development conveying managers' political maturation. In addition, I considered indicative of development not only changes in political will and skill, but also mechanisms or triggers causing these developmental changes. As such, I created a cluster of nodes called 'triggers'.

Quality checks. King (2007) suggested that quality checks are important particularly when using template analysis from a realist perspective. I thus followed some of his suggestions to address this concern. First, I allowed for independent external scrutiny of the analysis. In order to avoid the 'lone researcher bias' (Lofland et al., 2004), I shared some of my early interview transcripts with my supervisors, and compared coding. I also had regular discussions about the data analysis process and received feedback on intermediary versions of my findings from faculty at Cranfield and my research centre colleagues. Second, I created an audit trail of the analytical process, where I essentially wrote down the most significant issues, questions and decisions related to data analysis. At certain moments, I shared this audit trail with my supervisors. Third, the audit trail also allowed for reflexivity and served as a research journal – in other words, an explicit testimony of my personal assumptions, biases, and reactions that might have impacted the research process and the data analysis. I will draw on these observations in the Discussion chapter, when discussing the contribution to knowledge made by this thesis, from a critical realist perspective.

3.5.2 The use of NVivo

The data analysis process was largely carried out by using NVivo 9 software, a tool that facilitates the management of qualitative data. I initially read the interview transcripts printed out, to familiarize myself with the data. The scripts were then uploaded in NVivo and coded according to the Template Analysis approach described above. The software was particularly useful because it enabled swift (re)coding of data and reorganizing of codes, essential when developing the template.

Is it important to stress the fact that NVivo is meant to support the data analysis, rather than to conduct it (Bazeley, 2007). So while the software was instrumental in allowing me to categorize data through coding, it did not inform in any way the analytical logic behind it, nor the way I made sense of the coded data when interpreting the findings. The actual interpretive work entailed a

degree of synthesis and abstraction as explained above. The final synthesis, 'the story', is not told by the nodes themselves, but in the actual write-up of the findings.

3.5.3 Criteria for qualitative research

In addition to strictly analyzing the data, verifying and reporting the findings required tackling issues of validity, generalizability and reliability. These criteria, heavily used in quantitative and positivistic research, need to be reconsidered when applied to qualitative studies. Miles and Huberman (1994) relate internal validity in qualitative research to the authenticity and plausibility of individual accounts. Participants to the study were encouraged to remain authentic by several means: framing the interview in a non-judgmental way (given the sensitive nature of the research topic), giving firm reassurance about the confidentiality of the results, probing carefully during the interview, and remaining particularly vigilant to contradictory statements.

Though generalization is not the immediate purpose of qualitative studies, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that researchers should pay attention to transferability – the likelihood that the patterns identified and explanations proposed might apply in other settings. This was tackled by making sure that the sample chosen is, albeit not statistically representative, diverse enough to elicit different and potentially conflicting views from participants and thus provide rich conceptual material. In addition, given that participants came from two different organizations, the role of context in transferability of findings is to some extent illustrated by the very findings of this thesis. This will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of the thesis.

Finally, reliability requires the process and the findings of the study to be to some extent replicable (Patton, 2002). This involves rigour and transparency in the process of collecting and analyzing the data, achieved here by providing a careful account of the key steps undertaken in the study.

3.6 Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological choices the doctoral research project, starting with the underpinning critical realist philosophical perspective, continuing with the proposed qualitative research design and ending with an account of the fieldwork conducted. Details about the sample, and the data collection and data analysis process were provided. Table 3-7 below summarizes the methodological considerations discussed in this chapter. In the next chapter of the thesis, I will proceed to presenting the empirical findings of this research.

Table 3-7 Summary of methodological considerations

Considerations	Details
Research aims	To better understand managerial engagement in organizational politics, from a gender perspective
Research questions	RQ1: What attitudes toward organizational politics and engagement in politics comprise political will for male and female managers? RQ2: What does skilled political engagement entail for male and female managers? RQ3: How do political will and skill develop for male and female managers?
Research philosophy	Critical realism. Stratified ontology, focus on context-specific generative mechanisms which explain empirical regularities. Consideration of individual meanings.
Research design	Qualitative exploratory approach
Data collection	Semi-structured interviews
Sample	38 individuals holding managerial roles in two organizations (18 males and 20 females; 6 junior, 19 middle and 13 senior managers)
Data analysis	Template analysis supported by NVivo 9 software. Content analysis focused on thematic and processual / developmental patterns.

CHAPTER 4

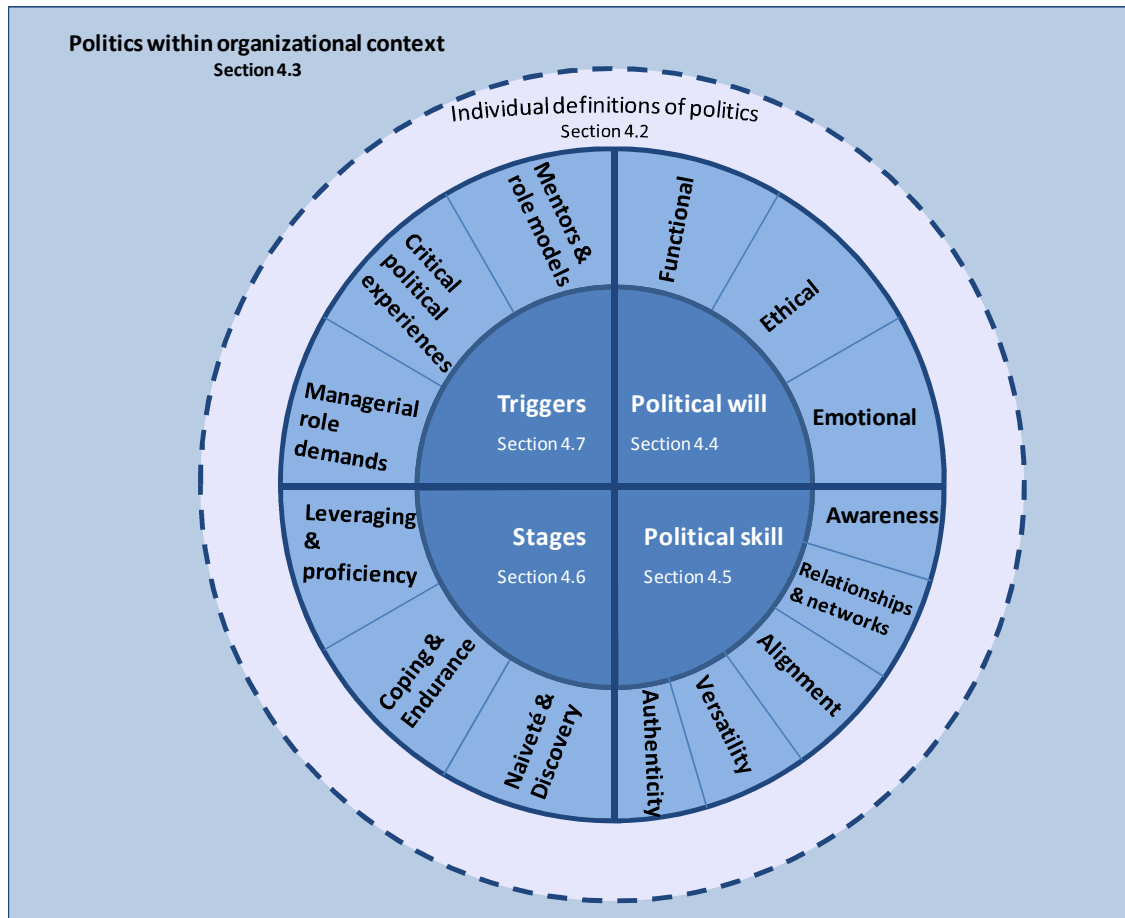
FINDINGS

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings informed by the analysis of the 38 interviews conducted. As a precursor to the core findings, section 4.2 of this chapter starts by clarifying the definition of the term 'organizational politics' within the sample of this study. Furthermore, section 4.3 discusses politics as related to the organizational settings in which the research was conducted. I then present the main findings, pertaining to the research questions formulated. A primary aim of this research was to explore managers' political will by examining their attitudes toward organizational politics and engaging in organizational politics. Section 4.3 maps out the concept of political will as defined above, by highlighting three key attitudinal dimensions underpinning willingness to engage in politics. In addition to their willingness to engage in politics, managers have also discussed their actual experience with politics, discussing specific behaviours and particularly commenting on how they became better at engaging in politics. Based on this, section 4.4 of this chapter presents the findings pertaining to political skill by outlining five key dimensions identified in the data analysis. In addition to mapping out political will and skill, this chapter also offers a dynamic perspective on these concepts. Specifically, section 4.5 examines development in political will and skill, describing three stages of political maturation. The triggers of this maturation process are then outlined in section 4.6. Figure 4-1 below provides a visual overview of the findings presented in this chapter.

Figure 4-1 Overview of findings



The reporting of the findings is underpinned by the transition from description to analysis and to interpretation of the data. Figure 4-2³ below illustrates this conceptual transition by highlighting the main steps of the data analysis process:

- Identifying **first-order themes** that emerged from the raw data; these summary statements of the accounts given by participants are highly descriptive and constitute the starting point of the data analysis process.
- Coding intermediate-level **theoretical categories** which cluster the first-order themes described; these represent the conceptual dimensions of the key constructs discussed (e.g. awareness and relationships – as

³ In developing this figure, I drew on an example provided by Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006).

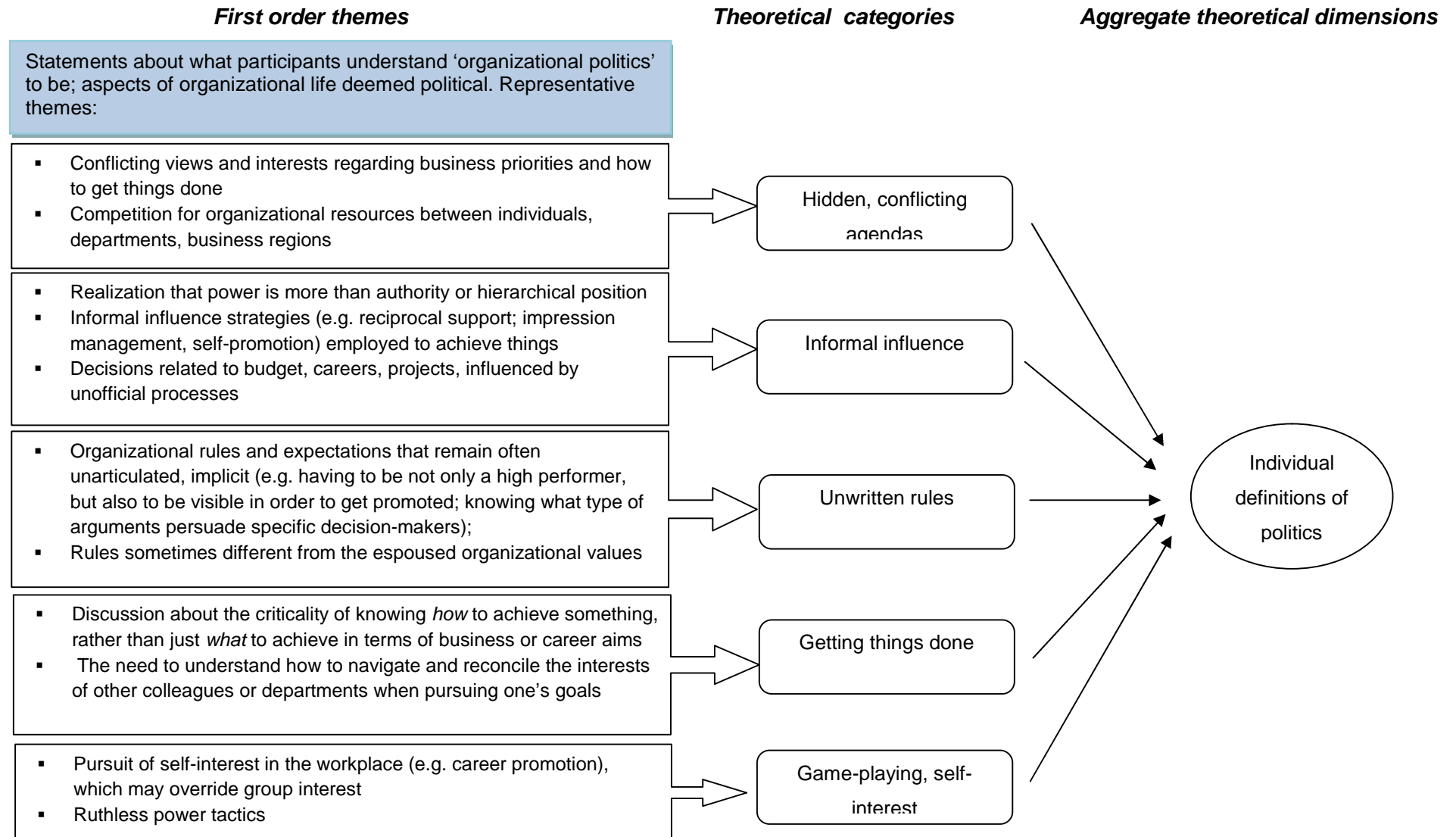
dimensions of political skill), and were derived by analyzing and synthesizing the first-order themes.

- Extracting higher-level **aggregate theoretical dimensions** corresponding to the key constructs discussed in this thesis (e.g. political will, skill, maturation stages); compared to theoretical categories, these dimensions convey an increased level of synthesis and abstraction in the data analysis process.

In reporting the findings, participants were given pseudonyms. The quotes provided illustrate both typical and atypical patterns of response. When providing quotes, I aimed to convey the diversity within the sample (in terms of gender, seniority, and company)⁴. However, the selection of quotes is not necessarily indicative of how salient topics were along these lines; the analysis and interpretation will provide guidance to that effect.

⁴ The quotes contain (...) to signal skipped words, utterances or digressions and [...] to signal the use of pseudonyms.

Figure 4-2 Overview of the data analysis process



First order themes

Theoretical categories

Aggregate theoretical dimensions

Statements about attitudes toward politics in general and toward personally engaging in politics; feelings, beliefs, concerns expressed when deciding if and how to engage politically. Representative themes:

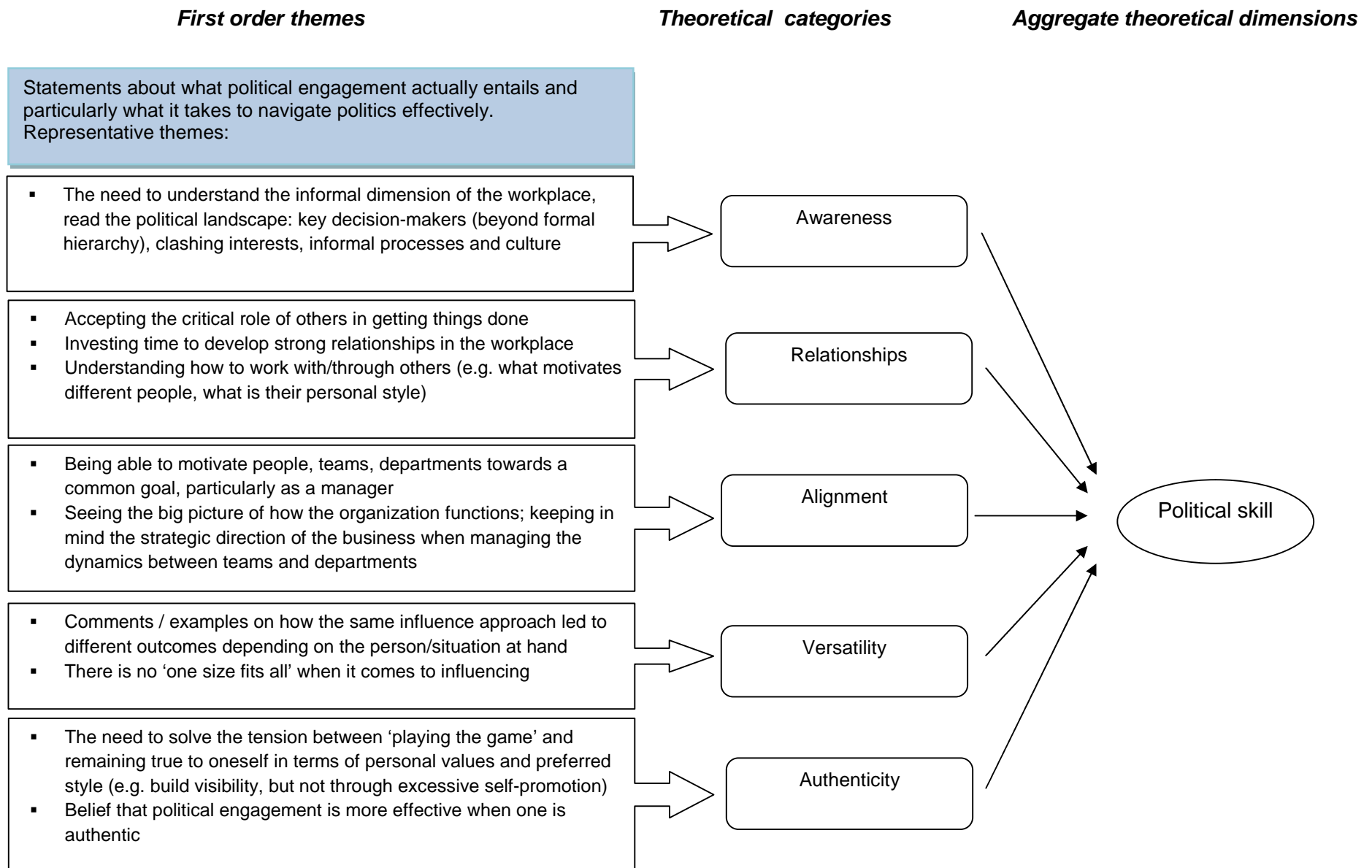
- The necessity to get things done; comments and examples on how politics can speed up decisions and enable one to achieve results (e.g. projects successfully implemented due to informal alliances)
 - Politics as a career accelerator
 - Negative outcomes of political activity (e.g. wrong business decisions, intensification of team conflict, demotivational for individuals)
- Concern for back-stabbing and victimizing effects in political situations
 - Beliefs that informality in decision-making is sometimes unfair
 - Politics as 'necessary evil' – unpleasant, but sometimes leading to good outcomes
- Networking, self-promoting experienced as uncomfortable activities
 - Reactions such as anger, frustration, stress when faced with politics
 - View that politics can be an interesting phenomenon to observe, or an exciting experience to be involved in

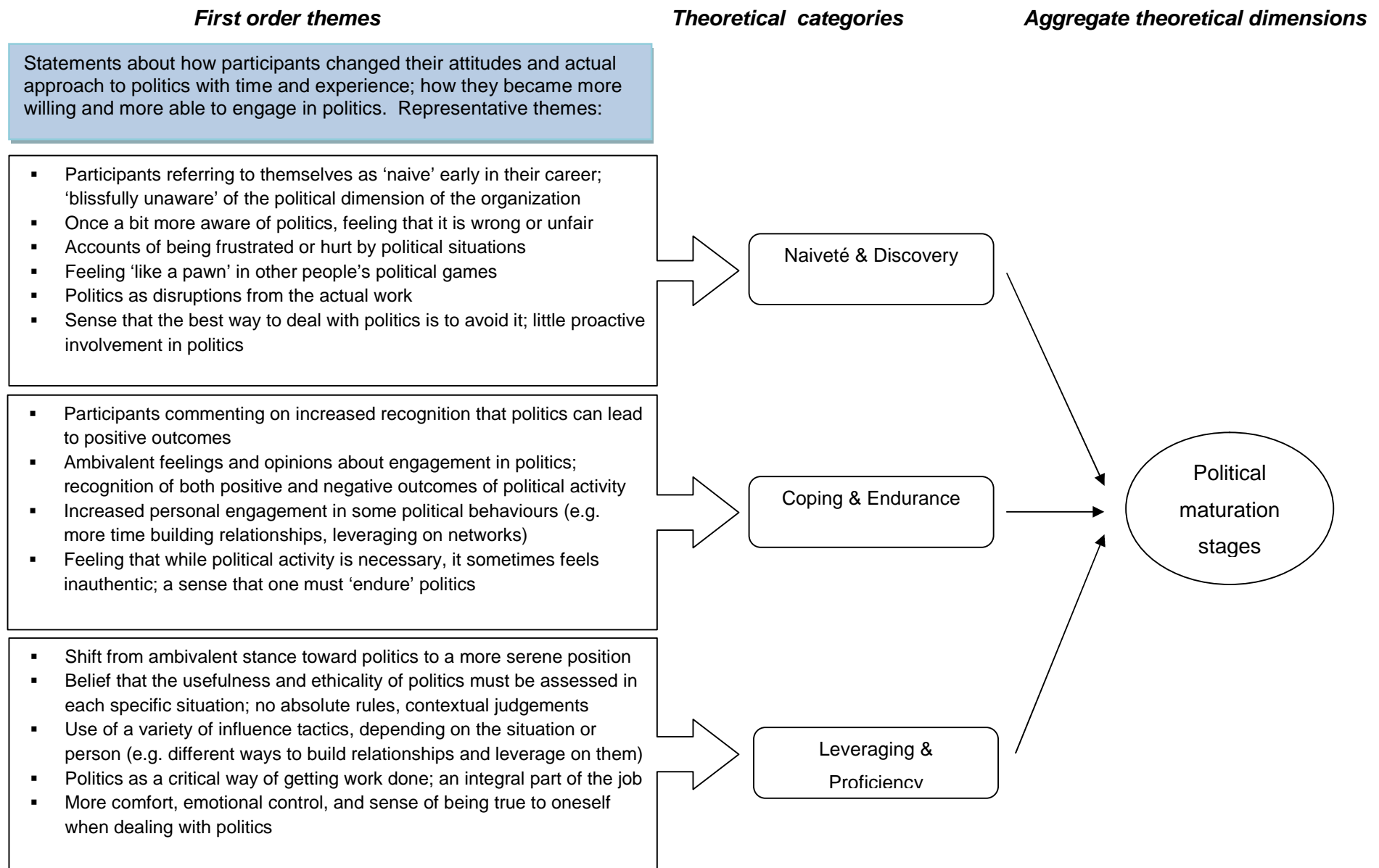
Functional

Ethical

Emotional

Political will





First order themes

Theoretical categories

Aggregate theoretical dimensions

Statements about what made participants change their views and approach to politics; what made them more willing to engage in politics and more competent to do so. Representative themes:

- The need to be more aware of the political landscape as a manager
- Views that the essence of managerial work is navigating and coordinating competing agendas, particularly in matrix organizations
- Need to manage politics not just for oneself, but also on behalf of the team / department / function one is responsible for

- Work experiences and incidents (not necessarily related to being a manager) that alerted participants to the existence of politics and made them understand how politics unfold:
- Individuals or teams claiming undue merit
- Failure to obtain career advancements due to insufficient self-promotion, lack of visibility with senior people, or gender bias
- Failing to push through projects and achieve results because of not paying enough attention to key stakeholders

- Learning by example: observing and reflecting on how other people engage in politics
- Descriptions of bosses, colleagues who deal with politics in a way that is worth of admiration
- The role of sharing: comments about how eye-opening it can be to talk through politically sensitive decisions with more senior people in the organization; valuable advice from bosses, colleagues or others

Managerial role
demands

Critical political
experiences

Mentors & Role models

Political
maturation
triggers

4.2 Individual definitions of politics

As indicated by the literature review, the definition of organizational politics is a contentious issue in the field. Central to the philosophical perspective underpinning this research is the assumption that patterns of meaning observed among individuals are indicative of ontological strata. So in soliciting individually-held meanings around organizational politics, I sought for patterns in those meanings and identified a common denominator which I considered indicative of participants' definition of organizational politics. In this section, I will highlight the key themes that point to a widely accepted definition of organizational politics within the sample. Table 4-1 below summarizes the key themes identified as participants discussed what 'organizational politics' meant for them.

Table 4-1 Key individual meanings of 'organizational politics'

Organizational politics
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Conflicting, hidden agendas➤ Informal influence➤ Unwritten rules, subtle, concealed➤ Getting things done➤ Game-playing, self-interest

The most salient theme conveying participants' definition of organizational politics appeared to be the idea of *conflicting agendas* in the workplace. All participants acknowledged, in one way or another, that organizations are inevitably amalgams of different and sometimes conflicting individual, group and business interests.

I think of organisational politics as whether or not people have their own agendas... and does that sometimes sort of conflict with the group agenda? (Esther, middle manager, Bevcorp)

I think you could slice the organisation in any way and if you use the lens of conflicting agendas it would come up all the time. (Colin, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Many participants discussed that conflicting agendas in the workplace are problematic to the extent that pursuing them entails competition for the same – inevitably limited – organizational resources. Dana's quote illustrates this point about *resource allocation*.

So while everyone in the business is wanting to get to the same outcome, and those outcomes are agreed and are at the executive committee and usually cascaded pretty clearly to the business, the tension becomes in what is the best way to deliver that outcome, and tends to emerge then through all the power on how... everyone's opinion on how to do that, emerges through who gets to allocate the resource, whether it be financial resource or human resource. So, in my view, all of the tension in any organisation, one way or another, gets back to resource allocation. (Dana, senior manager, Bevcorp)

The existence of conflicting agendas inevitably raised the issue of how one can read and navigate these multiple interests. Participants expressed an array of views about engagement in organizational politics. Some saw it as narrow pursuit of self-interest, others as defending departmental interests, and some considered it a way of aligning business agendas and implementing corporate strategy, or simply put '*getting things done*'. Regardless of the nature of the goals pursued, for a majority of participants engagement in politics was synonymous with the exercise of *informal influence*, as opposed to formal authority. Essential aspects of this type of influence were seen to be an ability to diagnose the unofficial power structures, to identify key decision-makers and the type of arguments required to persuade them.

Politics in my opinion is really understanding whom to influence and what kind of argument to bring in order to make things happen. So it's not going straight to the person who should be making decisions

based on the structure of the organisation; but going to somebody who influences the decision-maker and knowing what kind of argument you have to use to influence that somebody in order to get the right results. Basically knowing the organisation and knowing like 'the power base selling' we call it - where the foxes in the organisation are. (Adrian, senior manager, Semcom)

A number of participants alluded to the tacit and subtle nature of politics, often described as 'the *unwritten rules* of the organization'. An example is Kristy's quote provided below. Many found the elusiveness of politics tiresome and frustrating, while some described as interesting the process of deciphering these unwritten rules.

I think it's about that exercise of power within an organisation, and not necessarily the formal exercise of power. So like it's sort of informal exercise of power, it's about something that kind of heavily influences how things happen, and how to get things done in the organisation. That's kind of how I understand it, and it's often a bit below the... you know, under the radar kind of thing. (Kristy, middle manager, Bevcorp)

The *game-playing* metaphor was often used to refer to this interplay of more or less hidden agendas.

I think of the word games when I hear politics (...) mind games, hidden agendas. You never know... a lot of people can appear very two-faced, have their selfish motivations. Yeah, it's like a game, it's like you've got to know which side you're on and be able to win, I suppose. (Laura, senior manager, Semcom)

While the issue of conflicting agendas points to the various and potentially conflicting goals pursued within the organization, participants also spoke not only about the multitude of goals pursued, but also about the means employed to pursue them. This was obviously an integral part of their personal understanding of the term 'organizational politics'. A range of political

behaviours were discussed, such as impression management, forming coalitions, building relationships, networking, getting buy-in from key decision-makers, or lobbying for ideas before formal meetings took place. Engaging in impression management to enhance personal visibility was one tactic repeatedly mentioned, and generally perceived as serving personal motives. Another common tactic was forming coalitions or alliances to deliver broader departmental or business goals. Tom's quote describes this case.

It may be that you have to work jointly with partners to understand how the development of the market will be beneficial to [Semcom]. So indeed you have to be political in the way you join resources to get what you want. This may be another way of defining politics. And we do that all the time. (Tom, senior manager, Semcom)

While Tom's quote illustrates a relatively positive type of political tactic, several participants also mentioned more negative examples, such as dishonest reporting of business facts, gossip or personal attacks.

In a number of roles previously I did have... a new boss came in to the role and made my life so difficult, I think because she felt threatened by me, because I had got a good working relationship, I was respected, etc, and it was very clear that I was very different to her and she was not going to have... she was a different type of person. And so rather than embrace my strengths, she set about trying to undermine me in order to make herself look better. Rather than just saying, 'I'm different and I do it this way', and hoping to get respect for her particular approach, she felt the need to actually actively attack me and everything I stood for. I think she felt the only way that she could get the upper hand was in ruining other people's perception of me. (Rachel, middle manager, Bevcorp)

A majority of participants commented on the fact that the word 'politics' or organizational politics has *negative connotations* in common language. Interestingly however, while many acknowledged the negative sides of politics, it was also evident that their understanding of the term politics went clearly

beyond this simplistic negative view, especially for participants in most senior managerial roles. A few participants went as far as suggesting that the word politics should not be used, while insisting at the same time on the absolute necessity of understanding the political dimension of the workplace. The excerpts below illustrate this view.

I would say forget the word politics because it's a red herring. Understand the particular dynamics that are delivering what you would classify as politics because it is very situational and contextual. Seek to understand the different perspectives of those involved or their come-froms and then based on that decide on what intervention is going to get you to the outcome that you think needs to happen... is a way I would break it apart. (Colin, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Well I think actually putting the label 'politics' on it can be a bit of a barrier. So, I think if you kind of break it down to there are just... in order to navigate through this organisation, I need to communicate effectively with the right people. Then you can actually just focus your time on identifying who those people are and what's the best way to engage with them. (Corinne, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Interestingly, one of the participants spoke about the need to rehabilitate the term 'politics'. Her account, corroborated with comments made by other participants in Bevcorp, suggests that organizational culture shapes to some extent perceptions of politics.

I think it is interesting that it has a bad name. You know, organisational politics comes with some negative baggage, and I think that's fascinating. And it'd be great if we could kind of somehow reframe that for people. And I think we've done quite a good job in [Bevcorp] of sort of reframing it through the... Not that we've explicitly reframed it, but we've just... you know, we have this language about kind of leadership and how you get things done, and a lot of the skills that requires are actually kind of organisationally political skills. (Sally, middle manager, Bevcorp)

4.2.1 Summary

Despite the elusiveness of the term 'politics' and its somewhat negative connotations, it was obvious from the participants' narratives that there was a common understanding of the term. This section highlighted key themes found to portray this general understanding of organizational politics: competing individual and group agendas which shape resource allocation, informal power and influence, unwritten rules of the organization, knowing how to get things done. In addition, a range of political behaviours or tactics were mentioned, encompassing self-promotion and impression management, claiming or not acknowledging merit, controlling information, forming coalitions, and lobbying for ideas prior to formal meetings.

The defining aspects of organizational politics outlined in this section are not necessarily exhaustive or uniformly and entirely embraced within the sample; however, they do convey collective patterns of meaning around the topic. This section aimed to provide a definition of the term 'organizational politics' by explicating and summarizing these patterns of individual meaning. The rationale for doing so is twofold. First, a critical realist approach draws on individual meanings about the object of inquiry in order to employ retroduction by confronting empirical data with theoretical models in the field. Second, the term 'organizational politics' will often be used generically in subsequent sections of the thesis, including when providing quotes from participants. It became therefore important to clarify its meaning beforehand. Inevitably, there were individual differences in how participants defined organizational politics and in the language they used to talk about it, due to both individual and organizational factors. Addressing these differences, the next section discusses the nature of politics as related to the organizational contexts in which the research has been conducted. In addition, subsequent sections will examine the nature of individual differences in participants' accounts of organizational politics, with a particular focus on political will, political skill, and their afferent development.

4.3 Politics within organizational context

As suggested by the literature review, politics are by definition contextual and therefore to some extent dependent upon the norms and culture of specific organizations. While the previous section has established a common and high-level understanding of what 'organizational politics' means for participants in general, individual views and experiences with politics cannot be divorced from the specific organizational settings in which participants were immersed. This section therefore addresses the link between organizational context and the nature of politics as experienced by participants in the study. In doing so, it describes first separately, then comparatively, the key elements of each organizational culture which were seen to shape the nature of politics.

4.3.1 Organizational context and politics within Bevcorp

Bevcorp, a global leader in the fast moving consumer goods industry, was perceived by participants as having a strong corporate identity, with a very open and vibrant culture that appeared to cherish individual initiative and success, while at the same time placing a high prize on being collaborative and democratic. Valuing people and 'assuming positive intent' were also seen as defining values. Equally important was 'freedom to succeed', which legitimized individual initiative. In terms of management, many participants alluded to the complexities of operating within a matrix system. Essentially, a matrix system allows for a project-driven approach while preserving at the same time a hierarchical structure, which means that responsibility is often shared between a project manager and a functional manager. This requires staff to relate and collaborate across functions and may lead to divided loyalties between the project and the line function. For instance, Sally describes Bevcorp as being very matrixed and market-led and explains how the matrix structure corroborated with democratic, consensual culture creates politics:

We've got this culture where we value our people and we value people's opinions, everybody's allowed to have an opinion, and then, you know, we try and get to decisions by consensus. I think this creates politics

because, you know, if you're in a room and somebody says, 'This is the decision. Now go and do it,' there's... there's not grey space. But because we have quite a lot of grey space in decisions, in that grey space, people feel empowered to go and try and unpick decisions. (Sally, middle manager, Bevcorp)

As indicated by the above excerpt, while participants appeared extremely appreciative of Bevcorp's culture, they were also fully aware of the political challenges it poses. Due to its entrepreneurial spirit, critical to functioning within Bevcorp were the abilities to build relationships and align people around common goals. Colin for instance contrasts a 'command-and-control' culture with Bevcorp's 'collaborative and non-directive' culture:

[Bevcorp] culture which I would say is matrixed, is pretty... not command-and-control, collaborative. There's a different skill to aligning people and making sure politics doesn't get in the way in the skill you'd need in a very command-and-control culture. Because in command and control, the politics doesn't show up in the decision making because it's very clear, 'I make a decision, I make a decision.' The chunk of politics might show up in the back-stabbing, the whispering, the corridor conversations. In our culture you might not get that because everybody's fully expressed, but getting people aligned to a decision is more difficult and that's where you need to pay attention. (Colin, senior manager, Bevcorp)

I would say that [Bevcorp] is a very relationship-based organisation, so it's... whilst there is hierarchy, there is a lot about who you know and navigating through that network to get to the outcome that you need to get to. (Corrine, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Several managers commented on the downside of having a very collaborative, consensual and non-prescriptive culture, which was perceived to slow down decision-making and implementation.

I think that [Bevcorp] has an organizational culture that is designed to drive collaboration and consensus which is positive thing - we want people to like working together and to come to agreement. The downside of that is that therefore we are overly consultative and we are overly concerned about what the impact of a particular decisions or how a particular outcome might be perceived by internal stakeholders. So we spend a lot of energy thinking about what internal stakeholders we need to get lined up behind something and we go overboard on that. And that is a cultural thing about that culture of collaboration and consensus to things and it consequently creates... it's a barrier to swift action. (Simon, senior manager, Bevcorp)

4.3.2 Organizational context and politics within Semcom

While Bevcorp had a strong and explicit emphasis on getting things done through relationships, Semcom also acknowledged relational interdependencies but had a more process-driven and result-oriented culture. Andrea's quote below provides a good insight into the action-driven approach which defines the work style of Semcom's employees.

It is interesting because our team once had an analysis, you know, what kind of people we are, doers and analytics and all this... And the trainer said the majority, the vast majority of [Semcom]'s employees are doers. It was quite interesting to hear. And that's typical for the organization. (Andrea, senior manager, Semcom)

The organization was described as operating in a matrix structure as well, which raised the same issue of conflicting loyalties. In addition, a fairly direct and participative culture was conveyed by values such open door policy (freedom to approach superiors across hierarchical ranks), constructive confrontation, disagree and commit (freedom to voice disagreement yet still be committed to consensual decisions) and risk-taking. Amy describes Semcom as a 'very vibrant workplace' because it allows its people to take responsibility for getting

things done. Her comments depict a sense of initiative and empowerment, but also the existence of challenge and confrontation when necessary.

Our values are around things like risk taking, making sure that you have stakeholders on board. I think in a lot of companies a lot of their problems are often down to the fact that teams and groups are very stove-piped, so they have a job to do and they don't want inputs from other groups and they don't get involved with other groups. I know that's the case at some big companies like HP for example. Whereas at [Semcom] it's always been the culture that you can challenge another team on their results, deliverables. And that's your entitlement to do that. We have a culture of constructive confrontation so it means that it's a very open environment where people can challenge and contribute. (Amy, middle manager, Semcom)

While some believed that this culture of directness made Semcom a less political organization than workplaces, certain participants delved a bit more into the political complexities created by this culture of open confrontation. Tom and Heather's points illustrate these different perspectives. Heather's quote suggests that making choices about how and when to employ constructive confrontation becomes a political choice in itself.

I mean communication within [Semcom] is very direct, which prevents most of the politics, maybe not all of the politics. (Tom, senior manager, Semcom)

I think one of the other things that we do, which, rightly or wrongly, is we try and pre-empt the situation. So, if we know... if you hear a rumour that one of the senior managers is moving on, you try immediately to ally yourself to the person you think is going to take their place. And it's difficult to do that because [Semcom] also encourages constructive confrontation, challenging the process, risk taking, by doing those things; it's not a case of making enemies, but there are people that become wary of you. So, finding the balance between making the right challenges and

not being blacklisted by senior management is also a difficult one to manage because you have to be seen to be making the right challenges. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

Several participants commented on the cultural changes that the organization had undergone in recent years, noting a positive change toward a more collaborative culture, as Semcom has shifted its focus from individual performance to team performance and from a top-down approach and a more authoritative leadership to a more participative leadership which entailed empowering the staff to a greater extent.

In the past, we did have a very strong culture of mine, I'm not sharing, I'm not telling because guess what? Going into the focal review once a year I'm actually going to be measured against my co-workers. So in that type of environment you do find that people sometimes work beside each other and against each other. Now, again, that changed a couple years ago as well. We still have a meritocracy based system, but it's more about inclusion, team work, your success within a team or working through people, success through people, influencing people. (Irene, senior manager, Semcom)

One aspect of this positive change alluded to by female participants was a transition from what used to be a relatively macho culture to a more gender-inclusive one. Irene provides a concrete example in this respect.

I think that over the past years we've been able to address some of these topics or issues positively accepted. And I know a few months ago I openly brought up the topic of the old boys' club. I don't think there are many companies where you can go to the senior manager and just say 'You know, there's a boys club and you guys are criticized to be involved in'. And I think that was a really good exercise, I mean the feedback was very positive. So, I think the open door policy, as we call it within [Semcom] can be used to deal with this kind of topics. (Irene, senior manager, Semcom)

4.3.3 Summary

Overall, participants' accounts indicated both similarities and differences between the cultures and political landscapes of the two companies. A comparative summary is provided in Table 4-2. Structurally, both Semcom and Bevcorp are matrix organizations. This was seen to raise challenges such as divided loyalties and difficulty in assigning levels of authority. In both companies there was a strong sense of integrity and fairly positive perceptions of the overall climate and culture. Managers from both groups said they perceived their companies to be less political than other organizations where they had worked, referring particularly to the absence of what described as 'cut-throat politics'. The language used by participants to refer to the political dimension of their workplace was inevitably coloured by each company's values and discourse. However, by examining patterns of meaning, it became evident that different language was often used to refer to the same reality. For instance, both Semcom and Bevcorp embraced the notion of empowering their employees. Yet managers in Semcom would refer to this value by quoting 'risk-taking', while managers in Bevcorp framed it as 'freedom to succeed'.

Table 4-2 Politics within organizational context

Bevcorp	Semcom
Matrix structure	Matrix structure
Entrepreneurial ('freedom to succeed')	Entrepreneurial ('risk-taking')
Non-hierarchical ('democratic')	Non-hierarchical ('open door policy')
Consensual ('alignment')	Confrontational ('disagree & commit')
Relationship-oriented	Results-oriented, process-driven

Participants from both companies described their culture as non-hierarchical. This was alluded to in Semcom by values such as 'open door policy', while managers from Bevcorp described the organization as 'democratic'. Some

differences between these two organizations stood out as relevant to understanding the nature of politics in context. Chiefly, Semcom's culture was described as relatively more confrontational, while Bevcorp's approach was seen as rather collaborative and consensus-driven. While Bevcorp appeared intensely relationship-driven and valued relationship building, Semcom was more process-driven and task-focused. Finally, Semcom was a more male-dominated environment and appeared to have a more masculine working culture.

A range of contextual political issues emerged from this set of similar and dissimilar corporate values. Managers in Semcom discussed the need to calibrate the upfront use of constructive confrontation. While open communication was encouraged at a corporate level, this was not free from impression-management concerns from the part of individuals. In Bevcorp, managers discussed the importance of building relationships and aligning stakeholders in order to achieve results in a work culture that was seen as fairly discretionary.

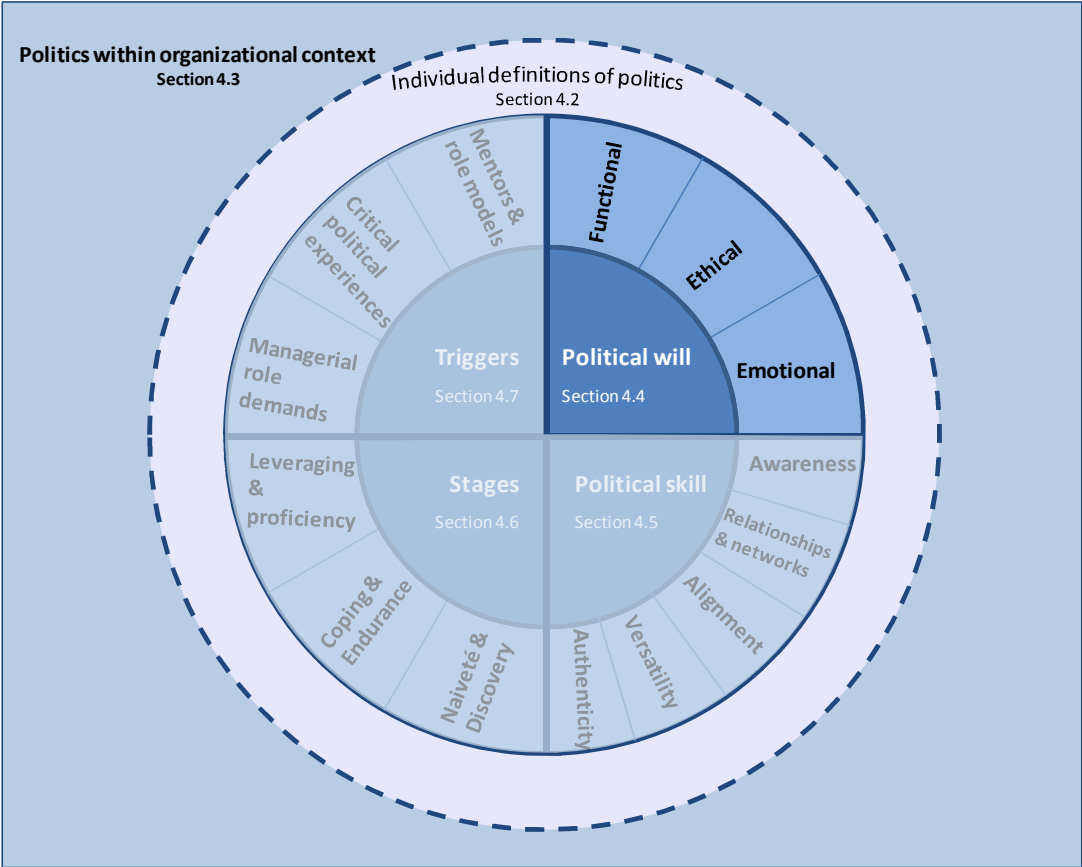
It is important to stress that the discussion offered in this section simply aims to elucidate the contextual factors that might have influenced managers' experience with organizational politics, therefore shaping to some extent their attitudes toward politics and their political behaviours. The unit of analysis of the research project and this thesis remains the individual, and not the organization. Therefore the purpose is not to provide case studies of organizational politics in these organizational settings, but to offer a nuanced contextual understanding while examining individuals' political will and skill. In the next sections, I will address the core issues tackled by the doctoral project by discussing managers' political will and skill, with references – when necessary – to contextual factors.

4.4 Political will

A key purpose of this research was to provide an alternative conceptualization of political will by examining managers' willingness to engage in organizational politics. This section presents the findings pertaining to this issue, as indicated

by Figure 4-3 below. Willingness to engage in politics was conveyed by an array of feelings and beliefs expressed with regards to politics and engagement in politics, which crystallized around three salient dimensions of political will: functional, ethical and emotional. In a nutshell, the functional dimension of political will concerns beliefs about the extent to which (engagement in) politics has functional or dysfunctional effects. The ethical dimension refers to judgments about the ethicality of political engagement. Finally, the emotional dimension refers to emotional reactions and experiences triggered by witnessing or engaging in politics.

Figure 4-3 Overview of findings: Political will



Attitudes along these three dimensions varied greatly within the pool of participants who took part in this study. In other words, organizational politics were described by participants as functional and dysfunctional, ethical and

unethical, and pleasant and stressful. Far from being problematic, this lack of attitudinal consensus within the sample speaks to the fact that political will is not a static phenomenon, but rather one that requires examination from a dynamic, developmental perspective. The nature of attitudinal changes in political will and their corresponding triggers will be discussed in greater detail in sections 4.4 and 4.7 of this chapter. This section strictly aims to map out and describe each of the three dimensions. A summary of these dimensions of political will is presented in Table 4-3 below.

Table 4-3 Dimensions of political will

Dimension	Explanation
Functional	Beliefs about the functional and dysfunctional outcomes of politics and political engagement (benefits and downsides)
Ethical	Beliefs about the moral aspects of politics and political engagement ('right' and 'wrong')
Emotional	The affective experience of politics, emotional reactions associated with engagement in politics

4.4.1 Functional dimension

Judgements about the functional aspects of politics were related to the foreseen effects of engaging in politics. Politics were often described as a ubiquitous and unavoidable part of organizational life and participants spoke at length about how and why organizational politics can be useful and dysfunctional at the same time. Most respondents emphasized the importance of engaging in politics as a manager, following the realization that as a manager, delivery and performance are inevitably dependent upon others. The excerpts below from Sam and Hugh highlight this idea of performing through others and the essential role of political skill.

Just by the very nature... when you become more senior you have to deliver through others. So therefore it means that you have to develop the skill more and more. (Sam, senior manager, Bevcorp)

An absolute necessity. I'm quite pragmatic to be honest with you. And maybe, you know, my eyes probably were well opened I think gradually as I've grown in seniority and experience over the age but particularly with that leadership programme where we spent a lot of time just exploring and assessing the value of relationships. And [*huh*] if it's down to relationships, well then you've got to work through people. I can deliver nothing on my own. In fact, I can be ignored completely. So that's not very successful. So really I think you've kind of accepted that organisations are collections of some very, very... of lots of people executing agendas and you've got to get on to those agendas. It's an absolute necessity. (Hugh, middle manager, Bevcorp)

While a majority of respondents stressed the importance of dealing with politics as a manager, the rationale for doing so was to some extent gender-specific. Interestingly, a few female participants with managerial responsibilities in Semcom mentioned the idea of engaging in politics on behalf of their team, with an almost protective role. In contrast, none of the male participants mentioned this idea, although they did acknowledge the functional benefits their engagement in politics might bring to their team (i.e. establishing lucrative coalitions, raising team visibility). This is indicative of the gendered nature of organizational politics in that specific context.

For me now it's easier thinking about the fact that I'm not alone, I have a team to promote and it's easier for me to say I would be promoting the work of my team rather than I would be promoting myself. (Alice, middle manager, Semcom)

Once my point has been made, I know my team's safe. They're protected. They can go and achieve the things they need to without

being a part of this. And then I will just back off and say, enough's enough. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

Many participants discussed the benefits of reading and engaging in politics in order to deliver managerial goals. For most respondents, this meant better awareness of informal processes, understanding of personal or group agendas, a focus on relationships and an active attempt to leverage on these relationships through informal influence processes - understanding who are key players within the company and how to influence them, tackling conflicts of interest. Amongst the most frequently mentioned benefits of engaging in politics were getting things done, securing resources, and speeding up organizational processes. Corinne's comment encapsulates some of these aspects.

I think that life would be a whole lot harder, a lot more stressful and frustrating, if you didn't have an eye to it. So I think politics can... it can actually help you and I guess speed up decision-making and what you're trying to achieve. (Corinne, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Similarly, Sandra's comments illustrate a growing awareness of these interdependencies.

I think the other trigger is when you need support from other people, in order to be able to do something, whatever that happens to be. And in order to get that support, you quickly learn that you have to be doing something that meets their personal objectives or their agendas or their... So I think you become very quickly aware over then because just you think it's a great idea, doesn't mean everyone else does. (Sandra, middle manager, Bevcorp)

In addition to enabling individuals to navigate internal organizational processes, politics was also seen as supporting managers to engage externally, from dealing with customers and external stakeholders, to implementing corporate strategy and building corporate reputation. Adrian for instance comments on several of areas where politics come into play, concluding that in the end it is all about achieving results.

[Politics] is an important part of our job because it's not only about delivering the right product at the right time to customers, but also in giving customers the right level of support. So supporting customer's decisions, supporting internal decisions in order to support those customers. So in my opinion it is quite important. And it's also important to influence the organisation in the way that, for example the level of head count that's assigned to different parts of the organisation is right. (...) In all those areas there is some politics in order to achieve results. (Adrian, senior manager, Semcom)

In addition to achieving strictly work-related outcomes, participants discussed personal benefits of engaging in politics, chiefly related to career progression. It was widely acknowledged that astute engagement in politics can be instrumental in this respect.

I think that the bulk of the politics that occurs is people jockeying for future promotions. (Robert, junior manager, Bevcorp)

I think it's ... when you look at your own career, just recognising it [politics] is a big step and then once you recognise it, thinking about how to address it or to understand it so you can position yourself in the right way is kind of key to you progressing. (Mike, middle manager, Bevcorp)

A few participants however discussed what appeared to be a less obvious and immediate benefit, namely skilful engagement in politics as an important factor in building or sustaining managerial reputations.

We're all judged all the time... people are looking at how you handle things. And if you don't manage the politics very well, that's seen as being a very junior thing, oh she can't handle the office politics. I think those kind of things, if you choose to go in and tackle them, then if you don't do them well, they're typically very public amongst the management team.... it's seen as more of a negative thing than if you fail on something else, because it's seen as this big business acumen if you can deal with

it, and if you can't then it's also seen as a big failure. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

In contrast, the accounts also highlighted a range of negative outcomes associated with politics, clearly highlighting its dysfunctional side. The main downsides of politics were related to unnecessary and manipulative game-playing, pursuing individual goals at the expense of collective gains, creating conflicts, and thus engendering discomfort and frustration amongst employees. As examples of dysfunctional politics, some participants confessed experiencing or witnessing situations where some individuals purposefully attempted to damage others' image or reputation. Another example of dysfunctional politics had to do with claiming merit without acknowledging the contribution of other co-workers. Excessive pursuit of self-interest at the expense of others was unequivocally seen as 'negative politics'. Sam, for instance, talks about his distaste for upward managing through excessive self-promotion, and neglect to manage downward.

So if I see bad politics it upsets me a lot. And what I would describe as bad politics is people spending all their time focused on their own career and self-development rather than the greater good of the organisation and managing upwards extraordinarily well and not bothering downwards. Making themselves always look like a shining star, that is something that I see no role for in the business. (Sam, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Discussing the 'very negative impact' politics might have in the long term, Emma focuses mostly on individuals driven by self-interest and sees any association with such individuals as reputation-damaging.

Well, maybe lack of trust and lack of credibility, not being able to .. like I said, damaging your reputation, not wanting to get into situations with them, having to do with the social part of it. You just don't want to engage, you don't want to deal with them. And I would say also, if you have to do it then you will get really defensive because you know that

person is probably going to screw you. (Emma, junior manager, Semcom).

Given that she perceives politics to be essentially dysfunctional, it is perhaps not surprising that her overall attitude towards politics is unambiguously negative.

No, I really don't like it. I think it's wasting time, energy... You're losing faith as well, it's just a lack of faith and time. (Emma, junior manager, Semcom)

Although several participants saw politics as mostly counterproductive and were reluctant to engage in it, others spoke at length about the downside of not engaging in it. Supporting to some extent Heather's earlier account about the reputational risks posed by navigating politics, Esther explicitly acknowledges how failure to read multiple agendas, to build relationships and to leverage on them using informal influence can negatively impact both work outcomes and personal reputation.

So, for example, trying to influence an FD in a market to follow the correct control procedures to get approval for something that they need to do... there were a couple of examples with the same person, somebody who had actually done a similar role to me in the corporate centre before, but was now sitting in a market and was FD of a market who felt that our department and our policies and controls were only there to make life difficult for people and slow down doing anything and therefore they would try to cut corners. And then that sort of reflects badly on yourself because you haven't got the strength of relationships and influencing to get that person to follow your advice and the protocol that needs to be followed. (Esther, middle manager, Bevcorp)

While there were individual variations in the extent to which participants focused on the functional versus the dysfunctional side of politics, a relatively large number discussed both benefits and downsides of engaging in politics, thus

conveying attitudinal ambivalence. Rachel provides an example of how politics can have both positive and negative effects.

It can do both [help or hinder]. I think it's depending on the level of politics and such, that if you understand somebody's modus operandi or what they're striving to do, if you can flex your approach to accommodate that without actually behaving in a manner that you wouldn't normally, but just by understanding what motivates that person and what their particular desire for the bigger picture is, then I think it can help because then you can get along with them and it can be rosy. Similarly, you can find yourself caught, through no fault of your own, between two warring factions and you're then in a position that you can't make them both happy so which one do you satisfy? And that can be very detrimental, and through no fault of your own you're in a no win situation. (Rachel, middle manager, Bevcorp)

This section illustrated the range of beliefs expressed by participants with respect to the functional or dysfunctional nature of organizational politics, thus conveying the functional dimension of political will.

4.4.2 Ethical dimension

A second attitudinal dimension related to politics had to do with ethical issues, often framed in terms of 'right' and 'wrong' or 'fair' and 'unfair'. Ethical judgments were generally linked to the purpose pursued when engaging in politics. If the above discussion about the functional dimension of political will showed that politics were perceived to serve both individual and organizational purposes, the data pertaining to the ethical dimension of political will suggest that overall participants perceived as unethical politics carried out exclusively for individual purposes; however, many of them considered it legitimate to engage in politics for the overall good of the team or the company. For instance, Andrew discusses how Semcom is involved in providing advice and expertise to the local government, explaining how the company influences policy in a way that might be commercially beneficial (e.g. increasing computer sales). He describes

that as a 'win-win situation' which exemplifies the notion that self-interest and collective interest are not always mutually exclusive. This is, in his view, a facet of politics which is ethically acceptable.

Well, politics has always two faces: a nice one and an ugly one. In the positive way, I would say politics is influencing people, in an ideal case, influencing people for a win-win situation. (Andrew, senior manager, Semcom)

Having discussed the positive, win-win approach to political action, Andrew then contrasts it with less acceptable aspects of politics.

There is also negative politics and ethics. There are huge range and varieties of internal politics you can play and negative is always when somebody influences others in a way that is not beneficial to everyone in the game; but it's probably some selfish approach, where you cannot demonstrate a win-win situation but a win for those who make politics in their terms. (Andrew, senior manager, Semcom)

Some participants acknowledged the fact that individual and collective goals are not always dichotomised. Harry for instance seems to frame it in gradual terms, suggesting that the more politics becomes about individual gain, the less reprehensible he finds it.

I guess I'm not so opposed to that as long as people that are driving a business agenda are using it. I guess that is fair, because I don't have ethical issues using office politics as long as it helps the group or the overall company or our sales and marketing group to win, to get ahead, then that is ok for me. The more it goes to the individual win, then I'm a little bit more sceptical or I try to stay away from it. (Harry, middle manager, Semcom)

Going even further in questioning this duality, Dana claims that individual and organizational goals are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Inevitably, this view

makes problematic any ethical judgement underpinned by a simplistic dichotomy of self-interest versus collective interest.

When people use that term 'political' they're typically saying that someone is only doing something to further their own gain. Now, and that's the interesting piece, because one way or another, you know, aren't we all doing that? It's just a question of if you're... what's going to benefit you also benefits the organisation. So if you can keep your own interests aligned with the interests of the organisation, then there's not that much difference. (Dana, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Other sub-themes emerged when participants explored the ethical dimension of political engagement. There was a general sense that gossip, talking behind people's back and very personal conflicts were negative and unethical office politics and in some way 'noise in the system', often without much ultimate relevance to the business. Certainly in the view of very senior managers, the political dimension of the workplace that required understanding and tackling had a greater scope and significant implications. Another aspect that was mentioned as ethically problematic by several individuals was deceit and lack of honesty. Regardless of the nature of the goals pursued, engagement in politics was generally seen as unethical when it had victimizing effects on others.

I think positive politics would be where you spend time reflecting with positive intent about the performance, the objectives of the company as well as development and aspirations of people. By the same token there's negative politics where individuals lack of positive intent and there's personal motives and self interest that indulge in consequences that have negative outcomes and create what I would call a bad outcome. So, that's how I see politics can be both helpful and negative too. (Vincent, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Raising the same point, Emma stresses that she is particularly vigilant to the ethical challenges of politics and willing to push back when faced with unfairness.

Probably ten years ago I would have said okay, whatever, I don't care. But now I'm fighting with it, I'm fighting against it. (...) I can now deal with it in a different way, whereby I make people aware that what they do is wrong. (Emma, junior manager, Semcom)

A perhaps less militant approach is displayed by Carol, who is also vigilant to ethical boundaries of political activities yet prefers to handle ethically sensitive situations in a more subtle way.

My style is probably to listen calmly and in some ways to play the game. Unless I feel that someone has gone beyond the point of gentle politics, being more loaded with what they're doing; in which case I will then have a discreet conversation with my line manager. (Carol, middle manager, Bevcorp)

While Emma's quote above is indicative of a fairly polarized attitude, many participants appeared to be less radical in their judgements about the ethicality of politics. Nevertheless, it was obvious that most managers considered ethical factors when deciding if and how to engage in organizational politics. For example, Rachel explains her reasoning on how to deal with work requests outside her prescribed role, which obviously pertains to the informality of politics. She confesses being willing to 'play the game' and reap the reputational benefits of 'storing brownie points' by taking on responsibilities outside her formal role, as long as what she is asked to do is not unethical. However she does insist on the necessity to think these decisions through from an ethical standpoint.

I think as you get older and you experience more and more workplaces and you realise that it's something that happens in all organisations, and it's a question of recognising it and deciding the degree to which you're prepared to allow it to go on unchecked, and obviously the point at which you'll say 'no, I don't think that's acceptable', or 'that's not ethical', or 'that's not playing within the rules of what I think is acceptable'. (Rachel, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Between the 'right' and 'wrong' extremes alluded to so far, there was a middle point of ethical relativism, corresponding to participants who made contextual judgements about the ethical nature of politics. For instance, Adrian described how his attitude towards politics evolved from an overall negative perception to contextual moral judgements.

Some people have very negative opinion about politics because politics is normally influencing people outside of the normal influencing path. But there is nothing wrong with that as long as you're not using it for achieving something which is not good. In my opinion politics is like energy or money - it depends where you put it. You either have good results or bad results. So politics itself cannot be good or bad. It really depends how you are using it.' (Adrian, senior manager, Semcom)

Overall, the themes discussed in this section suggest that judgments about the ethicality of politics are largely dependent upon the perceived motives driving people to engage in it. While a few depicted politics as 'wrong', a majority acknowledged that politics can be both ethical and unethical. This ethical complexity made many participants ambivalent and clearly conflicted about the ethicality of engaging in politics. Some participants appeared to take a more neutral stand on it, resorting to relativistic ethical judgments.

4.4.3 Emotional dimension

The third dimension of political will emerged when participants commented on the emotional experience of witnessing and/or engaging in politics. A range of emotions were expressed, from anger, frustration, discomfort, dislike and disillusionment to interest, comfort or even excitement. Examples of the negative pole of this continuum are embodied in the excerpts below.

I think it is an obstacle. I don't do politics, I can't do politics, I never could do politics. It makes me cringe. (...) The only thing I guess I would enjoy is stopping it. (Irene, senior manager, Semcom)

I think it's just I'm fed up with it. I'm fed up that everywhere I go, in any firm, there is politics. (Gina, junior manager, Bevcorp)

A first aspect that triggered a range of emotional reactions was related to the ability to read politics. Understanding the informal power web and various agendas in the workplace, identifying key decision-makers and ascertaining how to influence them – all these facets of political engagement were perceived by many as tiresome, frustrating and relatively stressful.

Certain aspects of it I don't like, so I don't like playing games. I think that one of the sort of negative aspects of politics is people always don't show their true colours. People are quite guarded with their own agenda and you end up playing stupid games of power, so I don't like that. (Mike, middle manager, Bevcorp)

If Mike's account evinces the difficulty of reading politics, Adrian and Heather offer a contrasting perspective, whereby they find it interesting to read the political game and observe it as it unfolds, to identify the key players and the best ways to influence them.

In general I think it's very interesting how we can influence the result at the end. So from that perspective I like to understand what is going on and who is making the decision and how to influence the people making the decision. What kind of arguments will work best and so on. So that's the interesting part and that's what I like. (Adrian, senior manager, Semcom)

I like the challenge of it. And I think, once you learn to identify who are the game players, it's a great learning experience to watch them in action. So, again, you know, once you've realised that, actually, some of the guys who look like they don't care are actually the best ones, watching their style of business or their style of interaction, they're pretty impressive. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

While both genders articulated positive and negative emotions related to

politics, some of the most negatively polarized accounts came from women. This was particularly the case in Secom. Evocative in this respect is the quote provided in the beginning of this section, encapsulating Irene's vivid rejection of politics. Other women expressed discomfort about having to 'play the game' in a way that feels inauthentic to them, particularly with reference to impression management as a specific political behaviour.

So I have to admit that even if I would be more comfortable having the results speak for themselves, and maybe having my manager promoting the work that I've been doing and then me only concentrating on the goal that I have to accomplish, it's true that if I take the time to think about politics and the way that I present the result, the way I present the issue that we have, and to whom I communicate that, it can be very powerful and it helps me save some time later on, and some energy. (Alice, middle manager, Semcom)

In a few other cases, women's negative emotions related to politics were not just related to their own experience, but also to the way politics might impact others. Emma, for instance, speaks about her concern that politics might victimize others who are less powerful or prepared to defend themselves. She is aware that her role as a manager gives her more power to react when confronted with politics.

I get really defensive (...) it makes me so mad, that people think about their own guts and using people to do what they don't want to do. When I say I'm getting mad, I think I'm putting myself in the position of realizing that other people maybe can't detect people doing politics or maybe people cannot react to other people making politics, you know, people not being able to defend themselves like I may be able to do it in that situation. And you have people just using politics as a weapon to put people down. So you know, I'm just getting really aggressive and defensive because I'm thinking about that as well. I'm thinking 'Well, if you were not talking to me this time you might have been talking to

someone who cannot tell you what I just said'. So it just makes me very short-tempered. (Emma, junior manager, Semcom)

In addition to the challenges and rewards of reading politics outlined above, another source of emotional reactions was managers' actual engagement in politics. This became increasingly salient as participants' managerial roles progressively exposed them to the inevitability of politics. Vincent, for instance, finds that engagement in politics creates anxiety, yet is fully aware of the necessity to navigate politics, and to do so 'smartly'.

Well, I don't like it. Not what drives me. It drives some people, everybody is different, what people like and enjoy is different from individual to individual, but the feeling it leaves in is more tension than pleasure. I view it as something it needs to be worked harder at... navigating myself around and not just navigating myself around organization politics, but do so smartly. Therefore it creates an element of anxiety and tension, yes, absolutely. (Vincent, senior manager, Bevcorp)

There was often a sense of resignation and acceptance, as some participants expressed emotional neutrality or acceptance of politics as an unavoidable organizational reality.

I don't really think about it one way or the other because I just see it as inevitable, as part of everyday working life. (Sarah, middle manager, Semcom)

In some ways it's maybe resignation that is the way that organisations work. You know, having worked for a few companies then I think there are always ways that you get things done and I don't think I've suffered a really kind of really negative experience with it. I think, you know, as I said, it can be frustrating at times and it can be, you know, understanding how to handle it could be difficult. But I think it's probably resignation... makes it sound too negative, but it's just the way that you have to do things really. (Aiden, middle manager, Bevcorp)

However, while a majority of participants were aware of the necessity of engaging in politics as managers, this engagement came at a high emotional cost for some. In the paragraph below Carol explains how she typically handles politics when faced with it, emphasizing the emotional energy this requires.

Yeah, underneath I'll be slightly annoyed and exasperated. Sometimes I'll feel unsettled. But my style is probably to listen calmly and in some ways to play the game. (...) Given the choice I'd prefer not to, and to use that phrase it's a necessary evil. If I don't then I will be at a disadvantage and my team and my colleagues may be at a disadvantage. (...) Yeah, I find it emotionally draining. I find it the toughest part of my job. It's the part that will keep me up awake at night. And it's the part that if you said to me there's one thing I could change about my job, it would be organisational politics. But it's a necessary evil, I think, of any organisation. (Carol, middle manager, Bevcorp)

While Carol describes politics as 'emotionally draining' and appears fairly cautious in the way she approaches it, Isaac offers a competing perspective. A certain playfulness transpires from his description of politics as an exciting game.

Business is like a big game. We are all big children. So to have a good game you have to have good rules; politics is like non-official rules (...) So for me, to play this game could be funny, exciting, and the thing I love most is to understand the psychology of others. Politics is just a psychology game... (Isaac, junior manager, Semcom)

Finally, a few senior managers seemed to have not only understood the necessity of engaging in politics, but declared themselves at ease about this. The quotes below depict this position. Although their current take on politics seemed fairly serene, these participants spoke throughout the interview about the attitudinal changes that occurred with time and experience, shaping their willingness to engage in politics and consequently the emotional experience of doing so.

I'm actually quite comfortable with it [engaging in politics], I think that's really a lot of what my role is. I mean you could call it politics, you know, you could quote diplomacy. A lot of what I do is using diplomacy to get to what I believe is the best possible outcome. (Dana, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Because I think it's a label for what we do, I think it's very important. I feel neutral about it. It's the process or the game that one is tasked with playing in an organisation with all these different agendas which can at times fall out of alignment, so I kind of feel fine about it really. (Neil, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Once affected by it, you obviously have to play along, either drive it forward or defend. I guess I'm comfortable with it, somewhat comfortable. (Harry, middle manager, Semcom)

The data presented in this section document the array of emotional reactions associated with engagement in politics, encompassing anxiety, frustration, cautiousness, neutrality, acceptance, comfort and even excitement. Section 4.5 of this chapter will provide more detail pertaining to the patterns and the changes in these emotional reactions, as well as their underlying mechanisms.

4.4.4 Summary

A key purpose of the current research was to provide a novel conceptualization of political will by exploring managers' attitudes toward organizational politics and engagement in politics. The analysis of the interviews singled out three attitudinal dimensions underpinning political will: functional, ethical and emotional. This section described each of these dimensions, providing empirical evidence to substantiate them.

These three dimensions were drawn out from participants' accounts and distinguishing amongst them was done for the purposes of conceptual clarity; in practice, these dimensions are inevitably intertwined and to some extent interdependent. At times, this interdependence entails positive attitudes on two

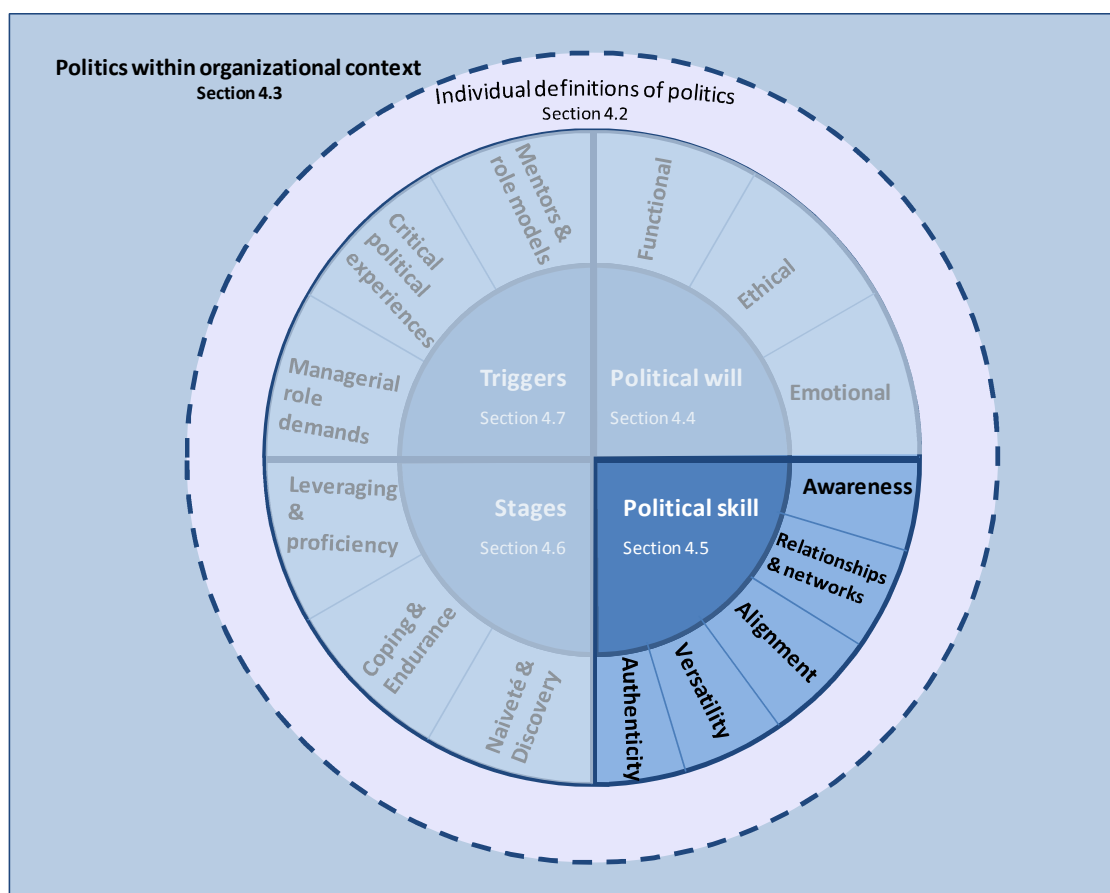
or three dimensions. An example of positive congruent attitudes along the three dimensions would be a manager whose engagement in politics is driven by a focus on the functional benefits of engaging in politics, who doesn't see politics as unethical and who is comfortable engaging in it. At other times, positive attitudes on one dimension did not always entail positive attitudes on the other dimensions. There was often ambivalence among the three dimensions. For example, many participants were able to identify the functional side of politics and yet expressed emotional discomfort when having to engage in it. Overall, it was evident that some attitudes expressed were more conducive to political engagement than others.

The accounts highlighted attitudinal patterns related to gender, whereby some of the most negatively polarized accounts were expressed by a few female participants. In addition, seniority appeared to play a role in the attitudinal changes participants described in reference to their views on politics and willingness to engage in it. In other words, the three dimensions of political will are not static but rather dynamic. Section 4.5 of the thesis will provide more detail about the nature of attitudinal changes underpinning change along these three dimensions will, and about their interdependence. The current section merely aimed to identify, describe and substantiate with empirical support the three dimensions of political will. Identifying these attitudinal dimensions provides critical insight into the core beliefs and emotions guiding managers' engagement in organizational politics. While these dimensions of political will concern the attitudinal aspect of managerial political engagement, a second major topic that emerged from the data pertains to participants' actual engagement in organizational politics. The next section will therefore tackle this aspect, by examining participants' engagement in politics from the lens of political skill.

4.5 Political skill

A second purpose of this research was to explore the notion of political skill. During the interviews participants referred not only to their views and attitudes toward politics, but also to their actual engagement in organizational politics. In doing so, they particularly discussed what it means to navigate politics effectively and how their ability to engage in politics had changed with time and experience. It must be stressed that while managers discussed a range of possible political behaviours they had engaged in or seen others displaying, the purpose of the data analysis was not to create a taxonomy of political behaviours, but to discern which behaviours constituted a skilled way of engaging in politics, from participants' perspective. As such, this section will report the findings pertaining to political skill. Figure 4-4 below illustrates the positioning of this section within the Findings chapter.

Figure 4-4 Overview of findings: Political skill



The data analysis revealed five dimensions relevant to skilled political engagement: political awareness, developing networks and relationships, creating alignment, versatile influence, and authenticity. Given that political skill was discussed by participants as related to their jobs, the dimensions of political skill identified are particularly relevant in the context of managerial roles. Table 4-4 below provides a summary of the five dimensions identified.

Table 4-4 Dimensions of political skill

Dimensions	Explanation
Political awareness	Ability to read the political landscape, understanding individual motives, mapping out conflicting agendas, reading the informal power web, identifying key stakeholders
Developing networks and relationships	Ability to deliberately build social networks and strong interpersonal relationships, instrumental in achieving business objectives and navigating organizational processes by providing access to key stakeholders in a given situation. Informed by political awareness skills.
Creating alignment	Ability to recognize competing agendas and to find common ground in the plurality of interests at stake through alliances, coalitions, sponsorship. Requires leveraging on relationships and networks.
Versatile influence	Ability to adapt one's influence behaviour to different individuals and situations. Builds on prior dimensions.
Authenticity	Ability to engage in politics in a way that is/feels genuine and consistent with personal values and preferred styles. Entails honesty, openness. Supports the other engagement skills.

The following subsections will describe these dimensions in more detail and substantiate them with empirical data.

4.5.1 Political awareness

A first dimension of political skill repeatedly invoked by participants was the ability to effectively diagnose or read the political dimension of the workplace. This essentially entailed recognizing multiple agendas in the organization,

identifying relevant stakeholders and key decision-makers, in order to gauge the best way of influencing them. Harry for instance talks about the importance of identifying key stakeholders not only in isolation, but by mapping out their informal networks.

At the same time, in terms of politics, you need to understand the different networks also, right? So, you know who's reporting to whom, but at the same time who is working with whom, who has... I guess there is a concept called 'power base' sometimes, which we usually refer to in the customer, but sometimes this is also applied internally. So, you know who influences whom, most of the time. I mean, it's pretty obvious. You see the networks within [Semcom], who talks to whom, who has decision making power, who is a senior but actually doesn't have any decision making power. (Harry, middle manager, Semcom)

While Harry seems to suggest that diagnosing power within these informal networks is fairly easy, a majority of participants perceived this endeavour to be difficult and effortful, given that the unofficial power web of organizations is by definition concealed to some extent. Sam for instance cautions that one can be mislead when trying to discern the real decision-maker in a specific situation.

I think that one of the things is that you continually develop your organisational awareness, yeah? So therefore that's about understanding what the informal decision making networks are, who is important to whom in terms of making decisions. Very often who looks like the decision-maker and maybe is even down as the decision-maker is taking a huge steer from someone else. And therefore I think one of the things you hone over time is that organisational awareness, thinking through: if we want to achieve this outcome, who are the key people that will make the difference to making this outcome happen? (Sam, senior manager Bevcorp)

Political awareness was deemed important by participants in helping them fulfil their managerial roles not only internally, within the organization, but also

externally, for instance in client-facing roles. Below is an example of how Heather, a senior manager, draws on this political awareness in order to anticipate support and opposition from clients and thus decide how to engage with them.

You have to be aware very quickly when you go out and speak to customers what their political view is. Are they a supporter? Are they neutral? Are they against you? And you can have the same meeting five times in one day with five different customers and your stance when you go in is completely different. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

The above quote also encapsulates a central aspect of political awareness, namely the ability to discern where others come from, and what their motivations and their allegiances are. While most participants stressed the benefits of political awareness, several of them analyzed in more detail what exactly this awareness entails. An interesting view crystallizing was that key to political awareness is understanding what drives other people and being able to examine a given situation from somebody else's perspective. From this viewpoint, reading politics essentially becomes a perspective-taking and empathy exercise.

I think the key learning factor for me is... in order to be successful at it - if you need to employ politics in your role - is to learn about people. So you should approach everyone, if they're important to your career and your life, actually approach everyone with the meaning that I want to know everything about you, I want to know what makes you tick, I want to know what your priorities are, I want to know...you know, that sort of thing...and to approach almost everybody within it, it is almost typologies inside, in that sort of way. (Sandra, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Building on this notion of political awareness as perspective-taking, several managers view the understanding of others' motives and agendas as an essential step in positioning and pursuing personal agendas. The comments below from Corrine and Mike convey this interconnectedness between multiple

levels of political awareness, encompassing awareness of personal agendas as related to others' agendas and to the broader organizational landscape.

So I think the challenge is always trying to see it from their perspective, and find or try and identify what motivates them, so that you can kind of use that to your advantage. Like standing in their shoes and seeing it from their perspective. Because if you can understand what drives and motivates them, I think that you can then... well, it should be easier for you to identify a way through, or, if not, understand why they are taking the position they are taking. (Corrine, senior manager, Bevcorp)

And then I think understanding the kind of political landscape. Once you have that then you have the power and I think that helps. So if you can understand what's driving people's behaviour, you can understand what's driving people's agendas and what's driving people's priorities, then you can start to position yourself in a way that you become part of that landscape and you can really start to get what you're doing onto people's agenda, onto people's priorities and onto people's kind of political landscape. (Mike, middle manager, Bevcorp)

In addition to highlighting the importance of political awareness, the quote above also hints at the link between being aware of politics and being able to engage it in. Indeed, a majority of participants perceived these two facets of political skill as interdependent. To illustrate, in the quote below Sally explicitly links the need to be cognisant how the organization operates informally to the ability to pursue business or personal goals. The excerpt also indicates that an astute understanding of individual motives crystallizes into political knowledge about broader organizational processes.

I also am aware of kind of how the organisation operates, informally as much as formally. So, you know, who has good relationships with who, who has what powerbases, and in order to get things done in the organisation, I do think all of that through. I do think, okay, so formally, I

need to go and get that person to approve it, but equally, in reality, if I really want this to happen, I need this person to be excited and that person to be excited. (Sally, middle manager, Bevcorp)

This sub-section has clarified and substantiated the notion of political awareness, essentially understood by participants as the ability to astutely read individual and group agendas, to diagnose informal power dynamics, and to assess how one's personal agenda fits within the organizational political landscape. In other words, political awareness is synonymous with the ability to perceive, analyze and diagnose organizational politics.

While political awareness was seen as a foundational component of handling politics skilfully, a complementary aspect of political skill discussed in the interviews related to managers' actual involvement in organizational politics. In other words, in addition to being able to read politics astutely, it was deemed important to be able to engage in political action effectively. Heather's quote below epitomizes this complementarity between awareness and engagement skills.

I think half the battle is being able to recognise it [politics]. The second piece is, I suppose, learning when it's right to use it. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

The next sections will present the key engagement skills discussed by participants.

4.5.2 Developing relationships and networks

A second engagement skill emerging from the data analysis pertained to *developing relationships and networks*. These were generally seen as vital to both developing political awareness and exerting political influence. From a political perspective, developing networks and relationships is closely linked to identifying and influencing relevant stakeholders when pursuing personal or business goals. Given the nature of the organizations in which the research was

conducted, the importance of relationships was often understood in the context of navigating the competing commitments of a matrix organization.

In my view you cannot be successful unless you can manage your relationship with both your line manager and the person you support.
(Dana, senior manager, Bevcorp)

While the focus on relationships and networks was salient across all accounts, the organizational culture added an interesting nuance in how this theme was referred to. The narrative for managers within Bevcorp was influenced by their experience with a corporate leadership programme which placed a strong emphasis on relationship building. So there was an explicit acknowledgement from their side of the importance of relationships when discussing the interpersonal nature of politics. In contrast, the managers from Semcom framed the interpersonal aspects of politics by drawing more on the notion of networks and working with and through people. These nuances are conveyed by the excerpts below. Janice is cognizant of the fact that establishing relationships will help her better understand other people's agendas, subsequently paving the way to pursuing her own agenda.

I would try in any role that I do to have very clearly who are the key stakeholders that I need to work with and build those relationships, but do it in as authentic a way as I can, rather than having a hidden agenda, or anything like that. So I would try and look at it that way, and if you have a good relationship with someone, you understand their agenda.
(Janice, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Harry recognizes that managing politics is ultimately about people and stresses the importance of being aware how one's political actions impact on others. So while for Janice the focus is on relationship growth, for Harry the emphasis is on the transactional aspect of the relationships. These differences are perhaps symbolic of Bevcorp and Secom's organizational cultures, characterized by a different focus on collaboration and competition respectively.

Because all this politics is all about people, so you need to know the right people or you need to have at least a door opened, you need to be aware of the potential consequences of what you are potentially causing by working behind the scenes, positive and negative. (Harry, middle manager, Semcom)

So while all participants perceived managing relationships as a key dimension of political skill, the way they understood and described what this actually entailed was to some degree coloured by the contextual differences in Semcom and Bevcorp's respective organizational cultures. Indicative of this is the slightly different language used to refer to interpersonal connections and dependencies ('relationships' in Bevcorp versus 'networks' in Semcom), a language slightly more impersonal in Semcom. For example, in the quote below, Sarah depicts the value of having a good network and explains that cultivating it is not synonymous with using people; unlike managers from Bevcorp who spoke about relationships, she speaks about 'links'.

I guess I use what I.... I probably have a very good network. One of the skills that I teach at [Semcom] is how to network well. I use an external methodology to do it, to show people, you know, you've got to be careful with the distinction between using people and networking.... but how people can be helpful to you and how you can be helpful to them, and how as a whole the company is stronger if you have all these links. (Sarah, middle manager, Semcom)

It was evident however was that developing relationships and networks was deemed a critical political engagement skill by most managers, regardless of nuances in language or the overall organizational settings in which these relationships had to be managed.

4.5.3 Creating alignment

A second political engagement skill identified was the ability to *create alignment*. The ability to create alignment relied on the other awareness and

engagement skills in that it required identifying relevant stakeholders and their agendas, as well as leveraging on relationships and networks in order to foster consensus and collaboration while acknowledging the inevitable plurality of interests. In both Semcom and Bevcorp, the importance of creating alignment was often discussed in the context of having to manage in a matrix organizational structure. This underscores the similarity between the political complexities all managers had to contend with. Janice for example stresses how implementing strategy relies on creating alignment between the project and functional goals pursued by various stakeholders.

Well I guess my role is to make sure that the business is aligned behind the strategy of what we're trying to do. And that the strategy we develop for my region is aligned with [Bevcorp]'s strategy. So I mean that's not particularly political, but I guess the political point is making sure that the right people are aligned behind that, and if they're not, then having the right conversations to make sure they are. That's my job: it's driving the business for the short and long term. (...) I'm leading a commercial piece of the business, and in our business we also have functional leads. So there can be times when those agendas conflict... it's maybe too strong a word, but are not completely in sync with each other. (Janice, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Recalling her experience on a specific project that required navigating political dynamics, Amy stresses the need to align peer teams by getting buy in from their respective leaders. Her reference to 'a dotted line' was a common way to signal matrix dependencies within Semcom.

And obviously there was a bit of resistance to start with but you've got to use influencing skills and getting the backing of their boss, the country manager, who's not a marketing ... he's not in the marketing hierarchy but nonetheless I'm a dotted line to him. So that's one example where I have to manage quite difficult politics there because my own boss was giving a very direct message that we have to do things differently. The sales guys have to come on board with it. But you can't just sort of

implement something without consulting people and getting them to buy in. (Amy, middle manager, Secom)

Some managers pointed out that creating alignment requires drawing on other components of political skill. The excerpt below shows how Vincent sees political awareness as foundational to creating alignment in order to pursue managerial objectives.

In order to be successful in the organization, creating alignment, strategy and execution of my area of accountability, competing parties and multiple stakeholders are a critical ingredient of that, for me as well as for my function. So, creating the alignment among individuals requires understanding of those individuals, where they are coming from, the understanding where they might not be aligned. This means that I strategically manage those expectations but also put myself in a position where I feel I can be successful in that outcome, that I can drive to the outcome that I want to deliver, relative to a competing set of priorities. That is one level of organization politics. (Vincent, senior manager, Bevcorp)

From the perspective of the managers interviewed, creating alignment entailed several aspects. First, they mentioned identification of key stakeholders and decision makers. These were generally seen to be line managers or individuals who required accountability for the achievement of specific business objectives, as well as other parties (individuals, teams) whose commitment was necessary in order to accomplish these objectives.

So we do lots of planning and that means that we have to engage with various stakeholders, because we need their support in order to achieve it, we can't do it on our own. So the planning team will invest quite a lot of time upfront trying to identify who are all the stakeholders we need to engage with. At what point should we engage with them? At what level should we engage with them? And the whole point of that is to... because they will all be decision-makers or they are required in order for

us to implement. We're trying to identify what's the smoothest way through, in terms of speed of implementation and, I guess, trying to minimise the resistance. (Corrine, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Second, alignment also relied on forging alliances and coalitions with key stakeholders. Essential for this purpose was progressing from an acknowledgement of differences among stakeholders to identifying the common ground and working toward a shared objective, while aiming to reconcile as much as possible the range of agendas at play.

Well even if we are a big company, we cannot decide everything and we cannot make everything the way we want. Coalitions are there to join forces, as we're not the only one to create markets, be creative, etc. To do that you have to compromise, because our partners don't have 100% the same objectives. What you get in coalitions is additional resources, what you lose is you need to make compromises. And this is again politics. (Tom, senior manager, Semcom)

From participants' perspective, alignment was achieved not (only) by relying on the formal hierarchical chains of authority, but mainly by proactively trying to engage in informal organizational processes and dynamics. Aiden's comments below allude to the proactive nature of this political engagement skill.

Well, there may be some formal structures in place either from a reporting line, or how we manage a particular team or make decisions. But then I think there's informal influencing, an informal network of how you build alignment to get to a desired outcome. (Aiden, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Encapsulated in the quote above is also the notion of informal influence as an approach to creating alignment. This will be discussed in the next subsection as a distinct dimension of political skill.

4.5.4 Versatile influence

Another core engagement skill emerging from the analysis of the interviews was the ability to exert *informal influence with versatility*. This builds on the previously discussed awareness skill to the extent that any attempt to influence individuals and organizational processes is informed by political knowledge. It is also the vehicle which allows individuals to leverage and on their networks and relationships and to create alignment. Referring to her understanding of organizational politics, Kristy stresses out in particular the ability to influence by leveraging on the informal side of the organization.

I think it's about that exercise of power within an organisation, and not necessarily the formal exercise of power. So like it's sort of informal exercise of power, it's about something that kind of heavily influences how things happen, and how to get things done in the organisation. That's kind of how I understand it, and it's often a bit below the... under the radar kind of thing. It's not something that is laid out - you wouldn't lay out in the document 'This is our politics around this'. [laughter] It's kind of you have to have an understanding of how the organisation works, and how to influence the organisation in order to get things done. (Kristy, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Concurring with descriptions of organizational politics as the 'unwritten rules' of the organization, political influence was seen as essentially informal, subtle, and covert. As Neil's comment demonstrates, a majority of interviewees stressed the importance of being able to exert political influence as part of their managerial roles.

A lot of what I need to do is influence people, and I think the political process is a process of influence and persuasion rather than command and control. (Neil, senior manager, Bevcorp)

A majority of participants also considered versatility to be essential to exerting interpersonal influence, commenting on the importance of being able to adapt one's influence attempts to different people and situations.

I think it's depending on the level of politics and such, that if you understand somebody's modus operandi or what they're striving to do, if you can flex your approach to accommodate that without actually behaving in a manner that you wouldn't normally, but just by understanding what motivates that person and what their particular desire for the bigger picture is, then I think it can help because then you can get along with them and it can be rosy. (Rachel, middle manager, Bevcorp)

While some managers seemed to display this behavioural flexibility with ease, others appeared to struggle or purposefully work towards it. For instance, when describing how she navigates politics, Sarah suggests that she consciously diversifies her influencing strategies by taking as example the style of a more senior female manager.

I look at people that do it a different way and I try and adapt my style to the situation and think right, would her style be better in this situation? And use that as a way of managing it. (Sarah, middle manager, Semcom)

When asked how she typically handles politics, Sally explicates how she adapts her style to the person she is trying to influence by tailoring the nature of the arguments put forward or by attempting to influence indirectly, through others.

I think about it quite a lot, you know, and I think about 'the how' I'm going to get something done as much as 'the what' I'm going to get done. Which I don't know whether that's good or bad, but I spend as much energy thinking about how I'm going to get something done as the what. And I try and completely change my style based on the person. So sometimes I'll try and be more rational and fact based if I think they're

more rational and fact based. Other times, I'll be more emotional if I think they're more emotionally driven. (Sally, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Several managers suggested that versatile influence means not only adapting one's approach to individual stakeholders, but also to specific situations or managerial issues which require different political considerations. Colin for instance identifies two categories of situational factors requiring contextual flexibility: at a broad level - understanding the pressures and agendas of different business regions to enable collaboration; and at a lower level - understanding how to manage individual agendas and political manoeuvres within teams. He concludes by stressing the importance of a situational approach.

I think the way you deal with 'politics' is situational specific. I don't think there's a generic approach. (Colin, senior manager, Bevcorp)

In conclusion, the ability to exert informal influence with versatility emerged as a key dimension of skilful political engagement. Accounts indicated that versatile influence is both person-specific and context-specific. However, while managers saw behavioural flexibility as enabling engagement in politics, they also stressed the need to have an approach to politics that is internally coherent and aligned with one's personal values. The next subsection will address this issue by discussing authenticity as the last dimension of political skill.

4.5.5 Authenticity

A last aspect mentioned by participants as relevant to skilful political engagement was authenticity. The notion of *authenticity* was related to being direct, genuine, honest and transparent when dealing with politics. This was discussed both as related to personal engagement in politics and to others' engagement in politics. Rachel for instance, while cognizant of the importance of 'playing the game', alludes to the (in)congruence between real opinions and displayed behaviours when cultivating relationships.

And I think the important thing about politics is, yes, by all means play the game, but don't let it make you behave in a way that you wouldn't do naturally, or that you're ashamed of. I mean by all means play the game, by all means. Yes that's a good person to cultivate; she can't do me any harm. But don't purposefully go out and befriend people that you actually, in reality, can't stand, purely for the advantage that you perceive you can get from it. So I think politics doesn't have to be a negative, I just think you have to make sure that you don't allow it to make you behave in a way that you wouldn't normally do or that you might be ashamed of. (Rachel, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Much like Rachel, most participants discussed authenticity after acknowledging the necessity of political engagement, identifying the essential skills required (awareness, relationships and networks, versatile influence) and explaining how they had acquired or employed these skills in their managerial roles. In their view, authentic engagement in politics was chiefly dependent upon the intentions and values underpinning political action. Sally for instance mentions the importance of doing 'the right thing' and standing for what she believes in order to feel comfortable when engaging in politics. These comments raise ethical concerns related to political action and stress the importance of the subjective experience of political engagement, thus signalling the interdependence between authenticity as a dimension of political skill and the ethical and emotional dimensions of political will. Additional discussion about these interdependencies will be provided in subsequent sections of this chapter.

For me to live comfortably in the world of politics – and, you're right, I do carry some baggage with the word – I have to always feel like I'm trying to do the right thing. And I'm being authentic, you know. I'm standing for what I believe in and I'm being authentic. (Sally, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Sam provides an example of how authenticity came into play when taking up one of his former managerial roles, which required him to be mindful of the cultural and political complexities of a new business environment, and to be

capable to navigate them. Sam recalls taking over the role of Finance and Supply Chain Director for Bevcorp's business in Malaysia, where his staff was subtly resisting change by preserving enduring allegiances with his Chinese predecessor, now Chairman of the business. Sam recalls feeling like 'some sort of White devil' in trying to navigate this facet of organizational politics. As a consequence, Sam takes a less conspicuous road to influencing: he nurtures his relationship with the chairman whom he sees as a key decision-maker, with the aim that the chairman embraces his vision and implements it as his own. Underpinning the rationale and the implementation of Sam's political tactic is a sense of being authentic, derived from putting forward what he deemed were the best ideas in that specific business situation.

Well I mean the key I've always found is being authentic, yeah? Straightforward and honest, and you don't say different things to different people and you... in that context, what I did is I made sure that I spent a lot of time with the then chairman... to align him to what I wanted to do and it became his ideas. Once it became his ideas, and I'm not precious about whose ideas things are, we could move with some pace. You just have to work out what is the most effective way to deal with it but very authentically, yeah? (Sam, senior manager, Bevcorp)

In the view of many participants, authenticity was also closely related to the notion of being direct and honest, thus encompassing elements of genuineness and integrity. Sarah for instance refers to the importance of 'transparency' and not 'schmoozing' people when attempting to sketch what a politically skilled individual would ideally look like:

I guess it's got to be somebody that is open, honest and direct. We use the word transparency. And transparency might mean saying 'I can't share that with you now'. So, I don't think you have to tell everybody everything, and I think that's a mistake that people make. But I don't want to be schmooze. So for me a politician, somebody that's able to manage that, is somebody that isn't trying to schmooze you; they're just telling

you the facts and they'll be open with you when they can't share it with you. (Sarah, middle manager, Semcom)

Several participants found that it was difficult to remain authentic when confronted to or involved in organizational politics. Despite understanding the benefits of 'playing the game', some managers found it unnatural or inauthentic to do so and opted out or calibrated their engagement in a way that preserved their feeling of being authentic. The quotes below are indicative of two points of view regarding this issue. Marvin talks about his dislike of colleagues who try to build relationships without taking a genuine interest in others, thus portraying a perceived lack of authenticity in other people's political actions.

Just because I'm very interested in football and they'll say 'oh did you watch the game at the weekend yeah, oh it was great wasn't it'. And I know they've got absolutely zero interest in football and are only doing it to get me talking to then try and get something out of me. I think you can tell those sorts of people because the following week they'll ask exactly the same questions because they haven't remembered what you said last week. So they're only doing it to get through to what they want to really get out of you. They're not really trying to genuinely be your friend or be interested in you or listen to what you're saying. (Marvin, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Esther in contrast discusses politics as related to career progression, suggesting that the need to 'be true to oneself' sometimes overrides considerations about the career benefits of political engagement.

If I'd have tried to push myself into a style that didn't come naturally, then I might have moved quicker in my career and been more senior now than I am currently. But at the same time I want to be true to myself a little bit. (Esther, middle manager, Bevcorp)

For some female managers in Semcom, authenticity was problematic because of a perceived incompatibility between political engagement and normative definitions of femininity. Irene's quote epitomizes this stance.

Goes back to nurturing, goes back to childhood... I was always brought up 'You'll be rewarded for the work you do'. Typical woman, I know, but, yeah, I just don't like it when I have to do politics, or stay in politics or join... Nope, no, not for me. I think actually for years politics has been associated... I don't know, for me, it's been men and white shirts and ties. It's been a man's thing. (Irene, middle manager, Semcom)

For other female managers in Semcom, who were less vehement in their rejection of politics, there was a degree of self-monitoring and self-censure when engaging in politics, specifically related to their gender. As such, they alluded to the notion of authenticity by discussing to which extent they can 'be themselves' – as women - when engaging in politics. Sarah for instance talks about the risk of being perceived as too tough.

Trying not to be like a bloke because I don't want to be, you know, seen as being incredibly tough. But I am tough. Harsh but fair. And there are some men out there that will come in and engage hard with you because they think that you're being hard, when actually you're not. You're coming in with a different approach. So I do think very carefully each time I do it [engage in politics]. (Sarah, middle manager, Semcom)

It must be noticed that while most participants discussed in some shape or form the importance of being and appearing authentic when engaging in politics, the term as such was used to a greater extent by participants from Bevcorp. A few of them made reference to a corporate leadership programme where they had explicitly explored the importance of authenticity when managing people. However, several managers from Semcom raised very similar issues without necessarily using the label of 'authenticity'. They discussed the importance of engaging in politics in a way that is transparent, honest and consistent with personal principles around fairness.

4.5.6 Summary

This section outlined and described the key dimensions of political skill. A first facet of political skill was awareness, or the ability to read astutely conflicting agendas within the political landscape. While this dimension was related to diagnosing, the other four dimensions of political skill pertained to managers' actual engagement in politics. Identified as critical to skilful political engagement were the ability to develop relationships and networks, to build alignment, to exert versatile influence, and to engage in politics authentically. These dimensions built on each other, so they were to a large extent interconnected. The accounts highlighted gender differences, suggesting that female managers – and particularly the ones in Semcom – struggled to a greater extent to preserve a sense of authenticity while engaging in politics.

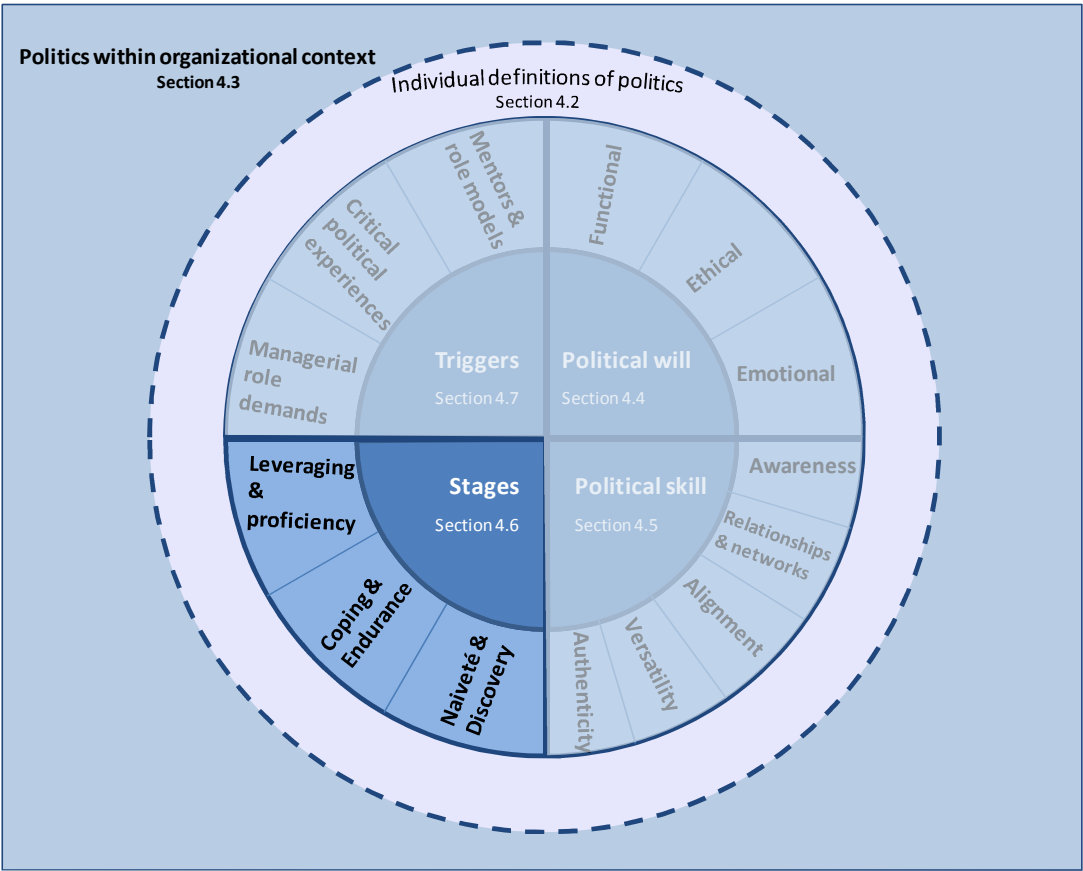
While these were identified as relevant political skills by everyone, the accounts did not necessarily indicate that they were employed or mastered by all participants. In fact, there was evidence that participants had developed political skill with time and experience. In other words, the five dimensions of political skill were not static but rather dynamic. The subsequent section will provide more detail about the nature of behavioural changes underpinning development along these dimensions. In addition, the analysis revealed that changes in political skill occurred in conjuncture with changes in political will, leading to distinct patterns of viewing and engaging in politics. Section 4.5 of the thesis will examine the interdependent changes in managers' political will and skill which lead to political maturation.

4.6 Maturation of political will and skill

The previous two sections discussed the key dimensions of political will and skill extracted through the analysis of the interviews. The accounts indicated however that political will and skill are not static, but rather dynamic constructs. Therefore, a second major aim of the analysis was to examine the nature of changes in participants' willingness and ability to engage in politics. These changes seemed to fall into a logical progression, crystallizing into qualitatively

distinct patterns of attitudes and behaviours related to organizational politics. The current section will examine how these dynamic patterns unfold throughout three stages of political maturation: ‘Naiveté and discovery’ (section 4.6.1), ‘Coping and endurance’ (section 4.6.2), and ‘Leveraging and proficiency’ (section 4.6.3). The positioning of these results within the overall structure of the findings is illustrated in Figure 4-5 below.

Figure 4-5 Overview of findings: Stages of political maturation



The stages depict distinct, yet evolving ways of viewing politics and engaging in it. The findings pertaining to these stages are summarized in Table 4-5 below. When describing these stages in the sections, I will focus on changes in both political will and skill, by tracking each of their corresponding dimensions. However, the three stages are not just additive descriptions of political will and

skill. They reveal evolving intersectionalities between these two dimensions, which crystallize into broader styles, mindsets and approaches to organizational politics. The term 'maturation' is purposefully used to signal a development of political will and skill toward greater willingness and ability to engage in politics. The underlying assumption is that not any change in individual attitudes and behaviours related to politics is necessarily developmental. Changes in political will and skill reported by participants were deemed developmental to the extent that they convey increasingly complex or sophisticated ways of viewing politics and engaging in it over time. This entailed for example, solving internal ethical dilemmas related to politics or broadening the repertoire of political behaviours.

Table 4-5 Stages and dimensions of political maturation

	Stage 1 Naiveté and discovery	Stage 2 Coping and endurance	Stage 3 Leveraging and proficiency
Political will	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functional: politics as dysfunctional, mostly related to pursuit of self-interest Emotional: shock, confusion, distrust Ethical: broad-brush labelling of politics as wrong, illegitimate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functional: persistent view of dysfunctional sides of politics, but increased recognition of functional benefits of political engagement Ethical dualism and ambivalence: politics as right or/and wrong Emotional discomfort, frustration and turmoil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functional and ethical: recognition of both functional and dysfunctional, as well as legitimate and illegitimate aspects of political engagement, but ability to make contextual judgements, thus transcending dualisms and ambivalences Increased comfort, managing one's emotions in political situations
Political skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic development of political awareness, grasp of certain unwritten rules of organizational life Political engagement skills: recognition of the necessity or possibility to employ skills like building relationships or exerting versatile influence, but very little actual engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refined awareness, encompassing ability to read motives and diagnose competing agendas which obstruct one's personal goals Practice of political engagement skills, particularly building networks and relationships Little versatility, resistance to flexing one's approach to influence Authenticity struggles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness as perspective-taking and connection Building relationships beyond transactional Increased ability to create alignment as core part of one's job Versatile influence refined Authentic engagement
Overall mindset and approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politics as illegitimate, disruptive, accidental aspects of work, to be avoided or contained Passive: non-involvement, avoidance, containment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politics as constant aspects of work, both disruptive and useful, to be coped with Reactive: resistance/challenge, reluctant and tentative engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politics as embedded aspects of the work itself, to be leveraged on Pro-active: anticipation of political threats and opportunities, selective engagement

Mapping out maturation patterns

The developmental perspective emerged as participants discussed how their attitudes toward politics and their approach to politics changed throughout their careers, conveying a persistent idea of growth or political maturation. This developmental story was in fact the frame of reference used by all respondents when discussing their experiences with politics; in other words, a persistent message coming through was around 'what have I learnt about politics'. Individuals' accounts portrayed willingness and ability to engage in politics as temporally evolving phenomena. Changes in willingness and ability to engage in politics seemed to fall into a logical progression, crystallizing into qualitatively distinct patterns of attitudes and behaviours related to organizational politics. I clustered these patterns into three stages of political maturation, which reflect how participants became more willing and more able to engage in organizational politics. Such sequential patterns are critical to the explanatory power of models employing a process perspective (Pentland, 1999). Rather than being discrete blocks, the identified stages portray a continuum which describes the journey towards political maturation.

In identifying these patterns, I drew on two distinct sources of evidence: explicit and implicit explanatory accounts (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 253). *Explicit accounts* refer to developmental changes identified by participants themselves. Reflection on learning in the political arena occurred for all managers interviewed. Inevitably, the learning and insights shared were to some extent seniority-specific. Furthermore, *implicit accounts* represent developmental changes identified by myself, as a researcher, through coding, interpretation and comparative analysis between individual accounts. This last trail of evidence enabled me to aggregate pieces of data (events, attitudes, behaviours) characterizing managers' journey with politics and to find broader inter-individual patterns with an underlying logic. For example, certain participants recalled being politically naive in the past and described what political naiveté entails (explicit accounts of maturation – e.g. having believed in the past that career promotion depends solely on skill and competence, ignoring

the importance of being visible), while other participants displayed political naiveté by discussing their current views and approach to politics (implicit accounts of maturation – e.g. holding the belief that being competent and performing is the key to being promoted, and choosing to ignore ‘political noise’).

In identifying and presenting developmental findings, I was guided by a number of prominent theoretical and empirical papers employing a processual approach, tackling developmental issues and using qualitative methods to do so (Isabella, 1990; Dutton and Duckerick, 1991; Pentland, 1999; Pratt, Rockman and Kaufman, 2006; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Langlely, 2009). While none of these studies are strictly related to the field of politics, they served as useful methodological examples for me, given that the literature reviewed in the field of politics provided no insights into how to investigate and report developmental aspects.

Individuals and maturation patterns

These stages are not meant to categorize individuals, but to describe distinct and evolving ways of viewing politics and engaging in it. Therefore, the maturation stages outlined are an indicative and not an exhaustive description of each individual's journey. In order to clarify the claims of the model, I discuss below the holistic and sequential nature of the stages, as well and the link between maturation patterns and seniority.

The holistic nature of the stages. While the stages convey general aggregate developmental trends, they do not suggest that each individual manager experiences these stages holistically. For example, regarding Stage 2, not all participants recounted or displayed the entire set of beliefs and feelings representing the described stances and changes in political will - some were more emotionally frustrated than others. In terms of Stage 2 political skill and its versatility dimension, some participants explicitly expressed resistance to flexing their political influence attempts; others did not necessarily mention resisting this, but did not provide evidence of valuing or adopting versatility

either. In contrast, this theme was explicitly discussed by participants displaying Stage 3 stances and developmental changes.

The sequential nature of the stages. Furthermore, the model does not suggest that managers progress through the stages at the same pace, linearly and invariably. For example, the findings revealed that some elements of the maturation journey are likely to be more arduous for women (e.g. ethical concerns and authenticity struggles). The Findings and the Discussion chapters provide additional commentary on how and why some of the stage-specific experiences were shaped by the gendered nature of organizational life. In addition, the stages do not represent discrete, clearly disjoint patterns of growth, but rather a continuum corresponding to incremental changes which span from naiveté to maturation in the realm of politics. In some instances, participants could be seen as ‘belonging’ to a certain stage because the self-reported attitudes and behaviours are fairly typical for that stage. In other cases, participants appeared to hold views or display behaviours that spanned across different stages, which in itself is evidence of ongoing maturation.

Maturation stages and seniority. Finally, maturation patterns were found to be seniority-dependent. In other words, increased seniority was related to increased political maturation. Table 4-6 below charts developmental accounts per participant, according to seniority. In compiling the table, I drew on the distinction between explicit and implicit accounts to indicate the nature of the data informing this individual-level summary (see table legend). The table shows whether stage-specific positions and changes were recalled as past experiences or displayed as current stances by each participant. However, it must be stressed that this table is an extreme simplification of the data, which primarily serves to offer transparency into the data analysis process.

Table 4-6 Participants per maturation stage and seniority

Participants	Seniority	Stage 1 positions and changes	Stage 2 positions and changes	Stage 3 positions and changes
1. Gina	JM	D	X	X
2. Robert	JM	R	D	X
3. Carina	JM	D	X	X
4. Emma	JM	R, D	X	X
5. Isaac	JM	R	D	X
6. Olivia	JM	D	X	X
7. Marvin	MM	R, D	D	X
8. Esther	MM	R	D	X
9. Mike	MM	R	R	D
10. Sandra	MM	R	D	D
11. Henry	MM	R	D	D
12. Rachel	MM	R	R	D
13. Kristy	MM	R	D	X
14. Sally	MM	R	R	D
15. Janice	MM	R	D	X
16. Hugh	MM	R	R	D
17. Chris	MM	X	D	X
18. Carol	MM	R	D	D
19. Aiden	MM	R	R, D	D
20. Peter	MM	R	R	D
21. Harry	MM	R	D	X
22. Amy	MM	R	R	D
23. Sarah	MM	R	X	D
24. Alice	MM	R	D	X
25. Simon	SM	X	R	D
26. Dana	SM	R	R	D
27. Colin	SM	R	R	D
28. Sam	SM	R	X	D
29. Vincent	SM	R	R	D
30. Corinne	SM	R	R	D
31. Neil	SM	X	R	D
32. Heather	SM	R	R	D
33. Andrew	SM	R	R	D
34. Irene	SM	D	D	X
35. Adrian	SM	X	R	D
36. Laura	SM	R	X	D
37. Andrea	SM	R	R	D
38. Tom	SM	R	X	D
Total		R=30 D=6 X=4	R=17 D=14 X=8	R= 0⁵ D=24 X=14

⁵ Given that Stage 3 is the final point of the maturation journey by definition, it can only displayed, but not recalled.

Table legend

R=recalled: stage-specific changes/positions described by participants as attitudes or behaviours defining their *past* stance toward politics (explicit accounts of maturation provided by participants themselves)

D=displayed: stage-specific changes/positions described by participants as attitudes or behaviours defining their *current* stance toward politics (implicit accounts of maturation, inferred by myself as researcher)

X=no evidence of stage-specific changes/positions

JM=junior manager, **MM**=middle manager, **SM**=senior manager

The table provides no insight into qualitative individual differences in terms of the holistic and sequential claims. Therefore, this table gives a generic indication of whether a given participant displayed *at least some* of the stage-specific positions and changes described in Table 4-6 below, but it does not specify which ones. Nor does it specify the pace of change or transition between these stages, among participants.

The table shows the following high-level trends per seniority group:

- Junior managers (N=6): four are in Stage 1, two are in Stage 2, none have reached Stage 3
- Middle managers (N=18): six are in Stage 2, seven are in Stage 3, four are transitioning between Stages 2 and 3, and one is transitioning between Stage 1 and 2
- Senior managers (N=14): thirteen are in Stage 3, only 1 is transitioning between Stage 1 and 2

Overall, 24 participants provided evidence of some attitudes and behaviours specific to Stage 3, but only 20 participants could be categorized as fully fitting Stage 3 (13 senior managers and seven middle managers). Many participants appeared to be currently somewhere between Stage 2 and 3. This may be due to the nature of the sample employed, mostly constituted by middle managers.

However, while there was a tendency for the more senior managers to express views and approaches to politics that were more typical of the more advanced maturation stages, this was not always the case. Some junior managers expressed views corresponding to Stage 2, and some middle managers

expressed views corresponding to Stage 3. Therefore, the maturation journey was only partially dependent upon seniority. A first possible explanation for this is that seniority is a proxy for experience, but these are not entirely overlapping variables. Seniority in managerial rank merely gives an individual the opportunity to accumulate the experience germane for political maturation. A range of other factors may determine to what extent learning around politics occurs based on managerial experience (e.g. individual factors, presence of other triggers conducive to learning). A second possible explanation has to do with the three-level taxonomy used to capture seniority (junior, middle, senior). These three categories are approximations based on job grades (when available) and job descriptions provided by participants. The 'middle manager' category is particularly broad, and it does not convey differences between participants within it.

In order to illustrate some of the benefits and limitations of the summary table presented, I will briefly comment on specific individual examples, interpreting the information contained in the table and making explicit some of the interpretive reasoning behind it:

- Chris (participant #17) is deemed to currently display stances typical for Stage 2; this does not mean that he displays all the positions and changes described as typical for the Coping and Endurance stage. For example, in terms of political will, Chris displays ethical dualism about politics, but does not seem as emotionally conflicted as other participants whose accounts may be categorized similarly; he is rather cautious and resigned about engaging in politics. With regards to political skill, he cultivates networks and relationships purposefully. His account provides no indication that he resists adapting his influence attempts, but at the same time he does not particularly discuss the importance of versatility (a political skill dimension whose growth is associated with Stage 3, and explicitly discussed by others).

- Gina (participant #1) and Olivia (participant #6) are both junior managers who currently display Stage 1 specific attitudes and behaviours. Their accounts provide no evidence of later stages, therefore one could broadly consider that they are at the very beginning of the maturation journey, in the Naiveté and Discovery stage,
- Aiden (participant #19) recalls the incipient learning points typical to Stage 1, comments on certain Stage 2-specific learning milestones, and displays attitudes and behaviours which span across both Stage 2 and 3. This suggests that he is currently transitioning between these two stages. Similarly, Marvin (participant #7) and Emma (participant #4) both recall some insights typical to Stage 1 – such as incipient political awareness – but at the same time they still hold attitudes specific to this stage – such as broad-brush labelling of politics as wrong. From a developmental point of view, the main difference between them is that Marvin accepts to leverage to some extent on relationships and networks, which suggests a transition towards Stage 2. Therefore, by sometimes specifying both recalled and displayed evidence within one stage, the table conveys transition between stages. Additionally, transition is also signalled by the fact some participants display political will and skill positions which span across two stages - for instance, Sandra (participant #10) and Carol (participant #18).

The table also signals lack of stage-specific evidence. For instance, a few senior managers – Simon (participant #25) and Neil (participant #31) recalled their past approach to politics which broad matched Stage 2 and displayed a current approach defining for Stage 3, but did not have a clear recollection of Stage 1 specific positions and changes (for example, being struck by political incidents or struggling to decode the political landscape and to accept the necessity of engaging in politics). Simon did comment on the fact that growing up in a large family and obtaining a university degree in Political Science made him attuned to the political nature of the workplace early on in his career. This

suggests that influences outside work shape individuals' maturation journey. Other examples of cases which lack stage-specific evidence are Sarah (participant #23) and Laura (participant #36), both middle managers in Semcom. They both provided accounts of their current views and approaches related to politics which can be classified as Stage 3; furthermore, they both recalled Stage 1 stances, but offered no evidence of transition through Stage 2. In other words, the shift from being politically naive to being politically mature remained relatively unclear based on their accounts. Looking back at my interview transcripts, I became aware that I had perhaps not asked sufficient change-related probing questions, which may be due to the fact that these were among the first interviews conducted for the PhD project.

By their nature, models involving stages or phases organize complex individual experiences or organizational processes, but inevitably do so by glossing over differences and losing some detail (Langley, 1999; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). Therefore, the model proposed by this thesis is tentative and not exhaustive; it does not suggest that the stages outlined are universal and sequentially standardized. Nor does it aim to establish a taxonomy of more or less politically mature individuals or to delve into the specific developmental journeys of each participant. Given the novelty of such a developmental perspective in the field, this initial model simply aims to sketch broad evolving patterns in the development of political will and skill, thus substantiating the concept of maturation. In the next parts of this section, the emphasis is on these aggregate patterns, rather than on specific individuals.

4.6.1 Stage one: Naiveté and discovery

The starting point of the political development journey is what most participants described as a certain naiveté. Political naiveté was typically understood as a range of assumptions individuals make about how the organization works, essentially revolving around the idea of meritocracy and rationality in organizations. This notion of naiveté was conveyed in some of the accounts provided by participants at junior managerial levels, as well as in the accounts

of participants in more senior roles, who retrospectively depicted their initial views on politics as being naive. Defining for this state is participants' obliviousness to the political dimension of the workplace or a relatively simplistic construal of organizational politics as narrow self-interest, or as conflicting views or interests to be promptly reconciled. If aware of it at all, at this stage individuals tend to view politics as an isolated, accidental aspect of organizational life and to depict it in fairly negative terms. Olivia's definition of politics exemplifies this:

[Politics is] unclear behaviour within the organization that is linked to getting something out of people. When relations are negative it can lead to problems and have destructive effects (...) I would say it's something beyond work, behaviour that happens beyond strictly business. (Olivia, junior manager, Semcom)

Her account indicates that she doesn't see politics as part of her job or impacting her role and in general, but rather as a disruption to doing one's job, which needs to be neutralized:

I haven't been facing it yet. I think it happens more between top managers. (...) I think what I appreciate is trying to do your job and avoid sensitive items that could cause some political behaviours. When you know you're working with a political person, just get the cold blood to say 'Ok, this is the job I need to do, let's stick to this.' Focusing just on the job. (Olivia, junior manager, Semcom).

Hugh and Sandra, two participants in senior and middle management roles, recollect this incipient **political awareness** as a developmental landmark. Hugh discusses a transition from a task-focused approach toward a more holistic understanding of work, which encompasses the acknowledgment of politics. His account suggests that at this stage there is a common perception of politics as the source of all evils; in other words, negative and indiscriminate attitudes underpin political will.

I think when you're relatively junior and inexperienced you're assuming that... well, you deal with the task that's there and you're quite executionally-focused. Then you're much more aware of the necessity of it. Because when you're junior in an organisation you're denying it, it's a pain. And everything's there because of politics and it's very easy to... there is an almost accepted orthodoxy that politics is bad. If it wasn't for politics everything would be rosy and things would happen. Great. You sit there in that particular canoe drifting off into the sunset for a while. Then you become much more aware that that's how things get done. (Hugh, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Sandra depicts retrospectively the same mindset by referring to a state of 'blissful ignorance'. She also notices that political awakening can be a somewhat abrupt experience at early stages of one's career, when the inability to read the political landscape of the organization exposes individuals to surprises.

I think whenever you start out working for any organization, you start out quite naive, not really understanding what's going on and often you're in blissful ignorance of any politics in the organization and that can come... I think when you're younger it can give you a bit of a fraught on occasions because things can happen that you weren't particularly predicting and actually it's all from a political situation that you didn't understand. So I think as you go through your career, those things become more visible to you and you're then able to access them and more easily read what is actually going on, rather than be naive about it. (Sandra, middle manager, Bevcorp).

So increased political awareness - a foundational dimension of political skill - emerged as critical in this first stage of political maturation. The analysis suggested that once a basic level of political awareness is achieved, attitudes toward politics begin to crystallize, thus forming political will. For individuals just starting to take on managerial roles, the **functional dimension of political will** appeared to be one of most immediate relevance due to a realization that

politics can either obstruct or support them in fulfilling managerial responsibilities. Sally's account is indicative of this realization that politics can be instrumental in achieving organizational and managerial goals, which corresponds to more positive attitudes underpinning the functional dimension of political will. Sally describes politics as 'organizational oil' and talks about the fact that she is much more open to it after realizing that without politics 'nothing can get done'. Her critical shift in mindset consists in seeing politics as a necessary effort to understand how people can support each other in pursuing their various goals.

I've had a huge shift in thinking about politics over the course of my career. So when I was more junior, I was like, all politics is bad. I will not engage in it. Absolutely, no circumstance. You should just be able to get on and do your job and that's all that should matter. And the big change that's happened to me is, actually, that I realised that there is some politics of, you know, understanding where you come from and what you need to do and, therefore, how I can help you achieve what you need to achieve and will allow me to deliver a better outcome. (Sally, middle manager, Bevcorp)

A majority of participants in middle and upper management roles commented on a desire to 'get the job done' by an excessive focus on technical competence and task execution, in the beginning of their careers. Colin's excerpt is indicative of how his notion of 'getting the job done' gradually shifted towards a greater acknowledgement of the importance of non-technical and rather political endeavours such as building relationships.

There's a learning around a naivety of my previous approach which is put my head down, do the right thing, get the job done. But maybe the job isn't nearly as well done as it would have been if you're engaging people and bringing people in and establishing bigger relationships, starting relationships. (Colin, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Another facet of development in political awareness transpired from

participants' accounts of their evolving notions of merit and competence when it comes to putting forward one's ideas in the workplace. For many participants, the starting point had been an apolitical assumption that ideas and suggestions should be embraced in organizational decision-making in virtue of the sheer intellectual quality of the argument put forward. Various experiences made participants question this assumption and realize that ideas, no matter how good, are inevitably exchanged in a political environment; consequently, assessing and anticipating the political landscape in which arguments are being aired out is critical to being impactful. With respect to this, Aiden commented:

I was probably naïve earlier on in my career to think that 'Okay, well you'd have an idea, you'd write a paper, you'd take it to a meeting and then someone would approve it'. (Aiden, middle manager, Bevcorp)

He then goes on to explain how his approach has changed, both at an attitudinal level, by realizing the necessity of political engagement, and a behavioural level, by actually engaging in politics to a greater extent. By drawing on the contrasting notions of being 'realistic' and 'idealistic', Aiden's reflective story alludes to an initial sense of disillusion and capitulation following the poignant realization that 'this is how the organization is'.

I think the reason why I kind of engage in organisational politics, if you like, is a desire to get things done. And if I didn't engage with it I just wouldn't be successful and I wouldn't drive the outcomes that I wanted to drive. And it's just, you know, I'm one person in 18000 people in [Bevcorp], so there's a recognition that, okay, well if I need to do things and this is how the organisation is, then this is how I do it. Which may sound a little bit kind of resigned, but kind of a sense of realism of 'Okay, well this is what I need to do'. (...) But to start off... it's kind of being younger and more naïve or idealistic about how things might happen. (Aiden, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Dana's account illustrates in more detail the transition from a rational to a political model of influence and decision-making. For her, one personal political

insight was to understand that over-reliance on rational arguments and neglect of the emotional aspects is not always the most efficient persuasion strategy.

I used to think I could win the day with my intellect. So if I had a rational argument everybody would of course see the rational argument. And I think what I've come to realise is the rational argument won't win the day; you have to also be able to kind of sell your ideas. (...). I've kind of realised [that some people] need an emotional argument; they need to be engaged with it emotionally. (Dana, senior manager, Bevcorp)

In this first stage, the **ethical dimension of political will** begins to crystallize. The interviews surfaced fairly rudimentary ethical judgements about politics. While there was an overall sense that politics is an illegitimate activity, there was little commentary or analysis as to what makes politics 'bad', and under what circumstances. Amy's account illustrates how at this stage, negative attitudes toward politics stem from a limited understanding of what the political dimension of organizations actually entails.

I think when you're fairly young and new in a job you don't ... you think of it in quite a negative way because you don't really know what's involved. And I think as you start to practice and you get more experienced you realise it is just part of the everyday job and it's not seen as something that's sinister. (Amy, middle manager, Semcom)

Amy's quote also points to a change in the **emotional dimension of political will**, a transition toward perceiving politics as less 'sinister'. Defining for this stage of political maturation were negative emotions such as shock, frustration, confusion or distrust. Gina for instance, describes individuals who engage in politics as 'sneaky' and appears sceptical and distrusting of politics.

Most people who are political that I know, they're driven; they know exactly what they want. But at the same time they know how to trick the people, to think their ways, more or less. And that's why I don't trust

politics. Because actually they're good at it, but at the same time it means they always have their own agenda that you may not know about, for them to succeed. (Gina, junior manager, Bevcorp)

While there is substantial change in political awareness at this stage, there is little development of other **political engagement skills**. In effect, at this stage managing politics is usually synonymous with avoiding it, containing it or delimitating it as much as possible from 'the real work'. For example, describing her reaction to politics, Olivia says that her 'first impression is always negative'. Her subsequent account of how she handles politics indicates the same reticence and distrust mentioned by Gina, as well as avoidance as a (non)engagement strategy.

Personally, I try to avoid it as much as possible. I think the most important is sticking to facts, and being honest and being fair. (Olivia, junior manager, Semcom)

The quote is also a testimony of negative attitudes along the ethical dimension of political will: evidently, Olivia sees politics as antithetical to fairness and honesty. Expanding on why politics necessarily entails dishonesty in her view, Olivia explains that 'if someone acts for their personal gain, then they may behave in inappropriate ways, like over-promoting themselves'. This resurfaces a theme discussed at the outset of this section - namely a task-focused and narrow definition of 'work' which not only shapes individuals' judgement of what are necessary and functional behaviours in the workplace, but also their assessment of how appropriate and ethical certain behaviours are.

In sum, foundational for this first stage of the political development journey is the growth of political awareness, a key dimension of political skill. This stage entails a gradual journey from obliviousness to political awareness. Actual engagement in politics, a second dimension of political skill, can largely be described as passive, to the extent that individuals describe their experience with politics as 'being caught in the game'.

Once relatively aware of the existence of politics, the political engagement strategies generally employed were avoidance and containment of politics. In terms of political will, beliefs around the functional and ethical dimensions start crystallizing and first emotional reactions are triggered. Politics are perceived as mostly dysfunctional and emotionally frustrating. Underpinning negative ethical judgements about politics are assumptions about the rational and meritocratic nature of organizations and a fairly narrow understanding of work as related to task execution and technical competence.

Table 4-7 Highlights of Stage 1: Naiveté and Discovery

Dimensions	Developmental highlights
WILL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional: politics as dysfunctional, mostly related to pursuit of self-interest • Emotional: shock, confusion, distrust • Ethical: broad-brush labelling of politics as wrong, illegitimate
SKILL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic development of political awareness, grasp of certain unwritten rules of organizational life • Political engagement skills: recognition of the necessity or possibility to employ skills like building relationships or exerting versatile influence, but very little actual engagement
OVERALL MINDSET AND APPROACH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics as illegitimate, disruptive, accidental aspects of work, to be avoided or contained • Passive: non-involvement, avoidance, containment

4.6.2 Stage two: Coping and endurance

The second stage of political maturation entailed first of all a refinement of **political awareness**. Following repeated exposure to political situations, participants depicted a novel understanding of politics whereby politics were increasingly seen not as accidental events in the workplace, but as an enduring presence in the organizational life. Isaac for example, speaks about the power of this new insight into the political dimension of the workplace:

It's not like a change; it's like a tsunami, like a revolution. Because in school you never learn that... In school you just learn theory, you never learn about relationships and interaction with people. (Isaac, junior manager, Semcom)

A gradual shift in mindset meant that perceptions of politics progressed from a vehement criticism of excessive self-interest to mere observation of conflicting agendas in the workplace. Typically, awareness of these clashing agendas occurred when individuals encountered obstacles in trying to achieve their goals. Recalling his struggle to manage a cross-functional project, Hugh speaks about the importance of reading multiple agendas, understanding how they dictate different priorities and how they require engagement of various key players. Referring to a specific project which required collaboration with another business unit, Hugh recalls 'banging his head against the door' in the process of understanding and accepting the fact that his view of the priorities at hand was not shared:

I needed them to view the prioritisation differently. So it wasn't that their job was to get priority one over the line and then two and then three and then if all goes well, four. It was to get all four over the line but clearly prioritise the delivery of priority one when it hit trouble. And people started to see that but I was banging my head against the door reading it in a particular way with folk who actually had little influence. And it took me a long time to figure out 'who's actually calling the shots here?'. (Hugh, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Interestingly, for Mike what triggered this awareness of multiple agendas was the development of his own agenda. This suggests that political awareness develops not only by observing how politics are enacted by others, but also by becoming aware that one's own interests and actions constitute political agendas in themselves.

I think as my career progressed I've started to recognise it more, so you start to pick up on it quicker. I think when you start out in your career

you're naïve to it, you don't appreciate it, you don't think about it. It's all just, 'Wow, big, shiny, new job,' and you don't really think about it actually. And I was probably naïve in not thinking that people had an agenda. And so I think as you get older, as you spend more time in the workplace, as your own agenda starts to develop, you start to think, 'Ah right, perhaps I'm not the only one'. (Mike, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Alluding to the notion of agendas and allegiances in the workplace, Kirsty describes the organization as a swarm of bees moving in various directions; her metaphor is suggestive of an increasingly politicized perspective of the workplace.

I see the organisation as kind of an organic... it's an organic being almost. It's like a sort of swarm of bees and you need to understand how the bees will move one way or move another way. (Kirsty, middle manager, Bevcorp)

However, in addition to awareness, the issue of **engagement in politics** became more salient as individuals were increasingly faced with politics in their managerial roles. More than in any other stage, essential to this stage was individuals' struggle to position themselves as players in the political landscape. This entailed intense changes in both political will and skill. With regards to skill, along with awareness of the political landscape came a degree purposeful engagement in politics. Several participants made explicit in their accounts this link between awareness and engagement in politics, commenting on how the former facilitates the latter.

I think that if you understand the reason why people do politics, it's easier to deal with it. (Andrew, senior manager, Semcom)

I think, you know, when you are very very young you are ignorant and innocent and you don't see those things because you don't know they exist. And then as you get a little bit more mature, more settled into the corporate life, you see ... well, some people are better off than others,

I don't mean financially, but they get promoted faster, they lick their bosses. (...) So, you know, you become more aware of things, and when you become a people manager or a people leader you have to become much more diplomatic and, yes, there are politics you have to cope with. But I think if you find out the rationale behind certain things, then is easier to cope with. (Andrea, senior manager, Semcom)

This increased awareness of the political dimension of the workplace did not necessarily lead to prompt political engagement. In effect, many participants displayed or remembered acute resistance to the idea and the reality of politics. In many accounts, there was visible inner turmoil and struggle related to political engagement, signalling evolving and conflicted attitudes along the three dimensions of political will. Defining for this stage was a widespread **attitudinal ambivalence along the three dimensions of political will** (functional, ethical, and emotional). These three attitudinal ambivalences sum up an array of contradictory feelings and beliefs expressed with regards to politics. Namely, organizational politics were perceived to be at the same time (1) functional and dysfunctional, (2) ethical and unethical and (3) pleasant and stressful. There were gender patterns in this respect, whereby some of the most conflicted and negative accounts came from female managers. An interesting nuance was added by the organizational context. In both Semcom and Bevcorp female managers appeared relatively more conflicted than male managers; however, within Semcom, women's discomfort became visible particularly in relation to what was perceived to be a masculine culture. Irene for instance uses vivid language to express her distaste for politics, which she describes as obstructive and stressful. Her expression of political will entails resisting 'the game' behaviourally, and a negative emotional experience.

I think it is an obstacle. I don't do politics, I can't do politics, I never could do politics. It makes me cringe. (...) The only thing I guess I would enjoy is stopping it. (Irene, senior manager, Semcom)

Underpinning Irene's resistance is an understanding of politics as a male enterprise and as antithetical to 'work'. In describing politics as 'a man's thing',

the undercurrent in her account is an assumed incompatibility between political action and female values.

It goes back to nurturing, goes back to childhood. I was always brought up 'You'll be rewarded for the work you do'. Typical woman, I know, but when I have to do politics, or stay in politics or join, nope, no, not for me. I think actually for years politics has been associated, I don't know, for me, it's been men and white shirts and ties. It's been a man's thing. (Irene, senior manager, Semcom)

Irene staunchly resists politics and condemns other women engaging in politics. Echoing the comments of another female manager from Semcom that 'women don't like to be seen as doing politics', Irene actually endorses a double standard in judging male and female political actors.

Maybe it disturbs me more because it is the same gender as myself. I just don't like, I just did not like women who do politics. (...) You know, the example I would give you - it is okay to see a guy drunk, but I think it's horrid to see a drunk woman. (Irene, senior manager, Semcom)

A few other women expressed concerns about the victimizing effect politics might have on others. The quote below is representative of this stance.

When I say I'm getting mad, I think I'm putting myself in the position realizing that maybe other people can't detect people doing politics or maybe people cannot react to other people making politics, you know, people not being able to defend themselves like I may be able to do it in that situation. And you have people just using politics as a weapon to put people down. So you know, I'm just getting really aggressive and defensive because I'm thinking about that as well. (Emma, junior manager, Semcom)

Emma goes on to explain how these ethical concerns have shaped her style of engaging in politics toward a more interventionist, corrective approach.

Probably ten years ago I would have said okay, whatever, I don't care. But now I'm fighting with it, I'm fighting against it. (...) I can now deal with it in a different way, whereby I make people aware that what they do is wrong. (Emma, junior manager, Semcom)

Emma's comment suggests that political will is not necessarily synonymous with 'playing the game' as defined by the status quo. Instead, political will may entail a drive to challenge political practices perceived as unethical or even to opt out. Several comments around the 'wrong'/'right' or 'good'/'bad' aspects of politics indicated that political engagement remained fraught with ethical concerns. A certain dualism transpired, along with a concern to distinguish and separate 'the good' from 'the bad' in politics. Hugh recalls this 'binary' view, while at the same time hinting at the necessity to overcome it.

I would have thought coming into it, you know, years ago, you might have had a binary view on it: it's good or it's bad. And then you kind of get to a point where it's actually irrelevant. The point is if you want to get anything done you've got to persuade. (Hugh, senior manager, Bevcorp)

In addition to these extreme positions of strong resistance or plain acceptance, there was also evidence of gradual **engagement** in politics as an integral part of this stage. Many participants appeared to experiment, albeit sometimes reluctantly, with influence behaviours central to political skill: building **relationships**, getting support, engaging in **networking** and impression management. As Sally's quote demonstrates, this often entailed drawing boundaries or defining one's own engagement rules.

So I try and use a range of different sort of strategies and approaches to deal with it. I personally have boundaries. I feel like if it's not in the service outcome, I won't do it. So, you know, sometimes, for example, I've had a previous boss who's said to me, you know, 'You should go and present that work to that person,' and I'm like, 'Why?' And they're like, 'Because it'll make you look good.' And I'm like, 'Well, I'm not interested in that. I'm only interested in trying to do my job'. And, rightly or wrongly,

I'm like, 'And then I will get rewarded for how well my job is done.' So there are things that I've been encouraged to do that I won't. I have a sort of set of boundaries, like, if I think I'm harming somebody or I'm just doing something for no purpose other than to look good, then I'm not going to do it. It's not for me. (Sally, middle manager, Becvorp)

Mirroring Sally's discomfort with impression management, Robert speaks about complying reluctantly with his managers' expectation to reach out to other team members more, in order 'to be viewed more as a leader'. His struggle with politics is, according to him, is to 'do things which don't come naturally' but which are seen as important by people who would affect his career decisions. Unlike Sally though, who refused to comply with similar expectations, Robert decides, albeit grudgingly, to put in more effort into developing relationships and raising his visibility. He observes the fact that trying to comply with these expectations forces him to build relationships in a way that does not feel natural; his preference would be to foster strong relationships, but to develop them slowly.

I know that in the last year I haven't done as much of that sort of fraternizing as I have done in the previous years because I've been so busy, but I recognize that that is something that is necessary, it's a necessary evil that I have to make time to do that in order to put myself in as a good a position as I can, should a more senior role become available. But I found that uncomfortable because it's not my natural way to operating to go and chat with somebody purely because I'm expected to or to achieve a particular end. (Robert, junior manager, Bevcorp)

Both Robert and Sally were reluctant to reach out to people without an immediate business objective. However, there was increasing understanding and acceptance of the importance of relationships in order to achieve work objectives. Explicating the role of politics in his role, Harry stresses the importance of cultivating good working relationships, as well as understanding the relational dynamics between relevant stakeholders. He sees his job as

highly dependent on collaborations, and consequently believes that part of his responsibility is to be able to work with various people and understand the relationships between them:

I'm partially dealing with colleagues on country level but at the same time I'm dealing with the managers on country levels as well. So, it is important that you maintain or you keep everyone's, how do you say, faces, so you don't go around people, you don't upset people in the decision, because usually once you damage a relationship ... It's a very very much a people-oriented job. You're dealing with people all the time. (...). And you don't need to win a popularity contest, but you need to be, let's say, respected and you need to keep the relationship alive. (Harry, middle manager, Semcom)

As Janice's quote below indicates as well, there was a growing acknowledgement of the various facets of politics which lead to a frequently used distinction between engaging in political influence for obvious business purposes versus engaging in political influence for personal gain; the first type was often seen as linked to genuine relationships, while the second type was associated with behaviours that felt inauthentic: 'looking good', 'fraternizing', 'maneuvering'. The defining pattern for this stage was an acknowledgement that political engagement is necessary and useful, paralleled by clear discomfort and strong resistance around the second category of political behaviour.

I feel it's something I don't want to engage in. I want to build great relationships with people around the business, but I want to do it in an authentic way, that's true to who I am, and true to what I want to deliver for the business. So if that's politics, then fine. If politics is around manoeuvring and playing games, then I really don't want to.... I wouldn't want to get involved in that. I've managed 18 years without having to do it, I think. And as you say, I guess my attitude's pretty negative. Maybe if I had a different definition of it, I would feel differently. (Janice, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Thus, the interviews suggested a turning point where individuals started perceiving politics as a 'necessary evil'. In contrast with the prior stage, where politics were perceived as an accidental nuisance to be avoided or contained, in this stage politics are seen as pervasive. Following from this is individuals' need to make sense of their own role or stance in relation to the political landscape in which they found themselves. Political action There was increasing recognition that A tension rose between the realistic, pragmatic necessity of handling politics in some shape or form, and the discomfort of having to engage in political behaviours which did not feel natural. The struggle around authenticity was particularly salient among some female managers in Semcom, who saw engagement in politics as a masculine endeavour. A number of styles emerged in response to this tension, among which the most typical were resistance and reluctant engagement. Table 4-8 contains a summary of this stage.

Table 4-8 Highlights of Stage 2: Coping and Endurance

Dimensions	Key developments
WILL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional: persistent view of dysfunctional sides of politics, but increased recognition of functional benefits of political engagement • Ethical dualism and ambivalence: politics as right or/and wrong • Emotional discomfort, frustration and turmoil
SKILL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refined awareness, encompassing ability to read motives and diagnose competing agendas which obstruct one's personal goals • Practice of political engagement skills, particularly building networks and relationships • Little versatility, resistance to flexing one's approach to influence • Authenticity struggles
OVERALL MINDSET AND APPROACH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics as constant aspects of work, both disruptive and useful, to be coped with • Reactive: resistance/challenge, reluctant engagement, tentative engagement

4.6.3 Stage three: Leveraging and proficiency

While the second stage was defined by tension, polarized attitudes towards politics and reactive engagement strategies, distinctive for this third stage was a general sense of appeasement. The views and experiences discussed in the interviews indicated that at some point, individuals embraced and transcended the polarity engrained in dualisms such as 'good' versus 'bad'. This resolution of ambivalences did not rely on a simplistic acceptance of the more controversial aspects of politics, but rather on a mindful positioning of one's personal engagement within the intrinsic complexity of political action.

For instance, Andrew's comment expresses the ethical ambivalence and duality typical to the prior stage, yet signals an emphasis on the positive side of politics. Andrew acknowledges the ambivalence of politics, analyses the 'good' and the 'bad', but concludes by focusing on the constructive aspects when defining his own terms of engagement.

Politics has two faces: a nice one and an ugly one. (...) There is good and bad. The good is influencing people to create a win-win situation or to create benefit for the company and there's negative politics where the ego is in the foreground and people try to influence for their personal benefit. But I really believe in win-win situations. (Andrew, senior manager, Semcom)

Developmental changes at the level of **political will** were evident across all three dimensions: functional, ethical and emotional. In terms of **functional** beliefs, there was a broadening perspective on the role and the benefits of politics as related to managerial roles. The emphasis on personal interest or conflicting individual or group agendas - which defined the previous two stages - was replaced by an emphasis on the role of politics in achieving broader strategic objectives. Hugh for instance recalls that his greatest learning was that politics is less about oneself, and more about understanding the other party and having a bigger picture.

I think over time I've become less judgemental, more understanding and willing to take time to try and understand the other perspective. (...) I think there's less emphasis on me, more emphasis on how are we going to get the organisation behind some of these transformational initiatives? So it's less about me, it's more around the broader agenda. (Hugh, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Along with the recognition that politics are relevant and potentially useful in understanding how to drive and implement strategic issues pointed out by Neil's comment, some participants stressed that it was their role as a manager to support their team in navigating the political landscape when pursuing strategic objectives. Simon's comment illustrates this multifaceted understanding of the benefits of political engagement, while advocating the necessity to deal with politics in a more pragmatic, less emotional way.

I think it is about a realism that it exists and an acknowledgement that whatever it is we do is not done in a vacuum; it is done in an organisational context that needs to be navigated. Then it is about helping myself and the people who work with me to understand what the particular dynamic at play in a given scenario might be and then how best to either overcome an obstacle or leverage it for a great outcome. (Simon, senior manager, Bevcorp)

In addition, there was also greater acceptance of the necessity to engage in political actions aimed at increasing personal visibility through impression management. This was particularly relevant for women, who often declared themselves reluctant to do so, displaying polarized attitudes and behavioural resistance – typical stances for the second stage. Alice explains her personal learning in this respect. Besides signalling an understanding that impression management is useful, her comments also hint to an evolving view that impression management is not condemnable; this shows how changes in functional and ethical beliefs are often interconnected.

When I started at [Semcom] my attitude would be somewhere where I would say 'do the job, very successfully, and overachieve and so on, and my manager promote it without me being able to promote what I've been doing' and him saying 'this is great' and then get back to his management saying that I did great things, doing all the communication part. This is not the way that real life is at [Semcom]. So I had to work on myself, and understand that self-promotion is not really a bad thing. Because you can wait and hope to have what you deserve and sometimes it is not happening because people are just not seeing you; because you are not working on politics and I would say on communication and how you communicate your results. (Alice, middle manager, Semcom)

Reasoning around the **ethical** implications of political engagement also became increasingly nuanced. While in the previous stage there was acute concern about the illegitimate nature of politics, the prevalent view in this stage was a fundamental acceptance of politics as a fact of life, or an *alegitimate* dimension of organizations. Neil exemplifies this stance.

I think in general when it's used it's generally a negative word, a barrier as to why something can't be delivered. But I have to say when I think about it, I think of politics a bit like I think of oxygen. I think of it as actually just something that exists, something that is not necessarily good or bad, but as the process by which human beings agree or don't agree what happens. So I think of it as sort of like a process of human interaction rather than as something necessarily bad or kind of complicated. (Neil, senior manager, Bevcorp)

The dualistic thinking characteristic to the previous stage was gradually questioned. A typical example concerns negative attitudes along the ethical dimension of political will in cases when political engagement was perceived to benefit personal agendas. Dana for instance deconstructs the widely embraced dichotomy between self interest and organizational interest. Condemning the pursuit of self-interest is, in her view, a narrow way of thinking about politics.

Instead, she raises the issue of aligning personal interest to organizational interests.

So if somebody says 'Oh, they're so political', when people use that term 'political' they're typically saying that someone is only doing something to further their own gain. Now, and that's the interesting piece - because one way or another, you know, aren't we all doing that? It's just a question of if you're... what's going to benefit you also benefits the organisation. So if you can keep your own interests aligned with the interests of the organisation, then there's not that much difference. That's usually what people mean by politics, like they all run around... So frankly, I just think that's a very narrow way of looking at it. (Dana, senior manager, Bevcorp)

With regards to the **emotional dimension**, both male and female managers increasingly highlighted more positive emotional experiences related to politics and political engagement, in addition to the emotionally demanding experiences typical for the previous stage. For instance, Heather and Adrian find interesting and worthwhile being able to understand the informal power dynamics, to identify and to influence key decision-makers and to observe other political players.

In general I think it's very interesting how we can influence the result at the end. So from that perspective I like to understand what is going on and who is making the decision and how to influence the people making the decision. What kind of arguments will work best and so on. So that's the interesting part and that's what I like. (Adrian, senior manager, Semcom)

I like the challenge of it. And I think, once you learn to identify who are the game players, it's a great learning experience to watch them in action. So, again, you know, once you've realised that actually, some of the guys who look like they don't care are actually the best ones.

Watching their style of business or their style of interaction, they're pretty impressive. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

These excerpts, corroborated with other comments, conveyed a sense of healthy detachment or distance with respect to politics. In effect, many participants evoked as key learning points the ability to step back and not take politics personally anymore.

I think I'm more mature in the way I handle it. I used to take it very personally. Now there's just a bit more, you know, it's a necessary evil, we're all here doing our day job to pay our mortgage, just handle it, deal with it, move on. Whereas before I'd sort of let it fester and harbour grudges. (Carol, middle manager, Bevcorp)

I think [my learning] it's pragmatically recognising that it exists and not raging against it because that's a waste of energy. (Simon, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Conveying the same idea about emotional control, Rachel explains how people get better at 'playing the game' because 'they understand it better, their reactions become less acute' and then reflects on her own learning:

I'm much calmer. I will think a lot more before I react. If I'm annoyed by something I will tend to go away and calm down before I react. I may then come back and what I say may be equally as strong, but it's well thought out and it's not... I don't shoot from the hip, so to speak. (Rachel, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Vincent suggests that being able to manage one's emotional reactions when faced with politics is the bedrock of 'developing a sense of foresight and anticipation' with respect to politics.

[I learned] That reaction in the moment can have disproportionate and damaging impact and results and that my instant reaction is therefore always likely to lead to wrong judgement. And recognizing politics

requires to take a deep pause, a deep breath, stop reacting; and act then strategically and not tactically, to get to the outcome I want. Pass the emotional attachment of the particular issue at stake. So trying to emotionally detach myself gets a better outcome in the longer run. Then, reacting is always to the situation, the situational politics management. Get out of situational politics management and get into strategic politics management. (Vincent, senior manager, Bevcorp)

The distinction Vincent draws between tactical and strategic ways of managing politics mirrors a key difference between the second and the third stages: the transition from a reactive to a proactive style of engaging politics. What this meant was that from a point onwards, individuals begun viewing politics not as something that needed to be endured or coped with, but as something that needed to be leveraged on. There was a distinctive sense of purposeful and mindful engagement, which entailed anticipating political opportunities and threats. Sandra's quote stresses this idea.

I do engage in politics and I'd like to think I do it from more of an observation, or a navigation point rather than actually being passive in the political landscape. Of course I am because I have my own politics, so I'd be kidding myself... I tend to try to be proactive about politics. (Sandra, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Overall, the developmental changes along the three dimensions of political will typical for this stage seemed conducive to greater engagement in politics. Therefore, a second developmental aspect consisted of a refinement of **political skill**. First, a qualitative alteration occurred at the level of **political awareness**. Defining for the second stage was a development in political awareness strictly linked to the need to pursue one's agenda in a specific political landscape. Building on this, what emerged as typical for the third stage was a broader understanding of awareness, as requiring perspective-taking or the ability to analyse a given issue from somebody else's perspective. In other

words, tackling the political situation at hand increasingly relied on a greater and more holistic emphasis on the other, rather than a narrow concern with oneself.

If you're good at playing the game, what it does, I believe, is enables you to look at a situation or a group of people, whether internally or externally, and be able to assess what their needs are, what their issues are, why they're against you or why they support you, and then to find the opportunity from it. And that's a really positive skill to learn, to always think about what's the other person thinking, instead of being really single-minded and thinking 'Well, this is what I want to achieve'. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

Several managers mentioned listening skill as critical for this expanding scope of awareness. Neil for example sees the ability to understand where the other person is coming from as essential to making things happen.

In the end it comes down to your ability to put yourself in that other person's shoes and connect. I'm focusing very much on the functional, but it might not necessarily be a hard, tangible, easy to articulate, work-driven agenda. I think you've got to try and understand the kind of culturally, kind of life stage. As I say, if you have the ability to see where the other person is coming from and connect that ability to what you're trying to make happen, then you can make things move forward. I'm not saying that's easy; I don't think it is easy, but I think it's a trainable skill as well as no doubt some people are naturally better at it than others. The art of really putting some time into thinking about where they're coming from and listening to them. (Neil, senior manager, Bevorp)

In emphasising the importance of listening, Andrea also alludes to a more collected approach to politics; this pertains to the distinction between the reactive and proactive styles defining stages two and three respectively.

I think there are a few things, criteria which I think are important [when dealing with politics]. First of all, don't jump to conclusions. The first thing

one has to do when one faces politics is listen. Listen to the issue, listen to other people's opinion and don't make up your mind before having listened to it. (Andrea, senior manager, Semcom)

There was also evidence of substantial refinement in the **political engagement skills. Relationships, networks**, the ability to work through others were increasingly seen as central aspects of participants' roles and responsibilities.

What has changed is understanding the value of building relationships and influencing those people who can enable you to adequately succeed in your current role, at the end of the day, will lead to further opportunities up the chain, if you do a good job. So the emphasis on being able to influence those who can succeed in the current situation has certainly improved over time. And I suppose one of the big things, where my head is at now in terms of if I want to succeed - relations is such a huge part of that. Coming out of university and entering the workforce, obviously, there's a great focus on technical skills and being able to apply those skills. Whereas now, I think my focus has shifted from seeing myself as a technician, to seeing myself really as a person, working within a team and being able to communicate and influence people is more important than my technical ability. (Henry, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Some of the naive assumptions described in Stage one have clearly been dismantled. For example, Andrew explains that good ideas alone do not guarantee success; one needs to ensure political traction by leveraging on networks and relationships.

I learned a lot in working with government, I also learned a lot from my job and it is that part that... just because you have a good idea and just because it will definitely be of a good benefit for the company, you won't necessarily succeed if you don't prepare a decision-making good enough by influencing others before the decision being made. So, actually, building a lobby or building a network of supporters is definitely

something that works in government, in groups of politicians, but it also works internally. (Andrew, senior manager, Semcom)

A clearer sense of intentionality and proactiveness transpired as participants spoke about their effort and ability to employ political skills. Henry's quote is illustrative in this respect. Henry confesses that he is comfortable exerting influence through relationships, while stressing his conscious, strategic attempt to do so.

Look, I think that there's an element of it that you just need to do this. And when I say that, I'm talking about the building of relationships and knowing how to influence the people who are key to the success for your role at a given point in time. So if I've got a list of objectives that I need to have for the year, which have to be aligned with the business objectives and all the rest of it, then I need to be able to work effectively and influence those people who can enable me to deliver that. So there's an acknowledgement that I need to do that, and I have no problem with that. I think that's just a core skill that you need to be able to develop, and I'm very comfortable with doing that. I make a conscious effort to ensure that happens. (Henry, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Not only were relationships and networks acknowledged as having a central role, but there was added nuance in the understanding of what building relationships entails or what it may offer. This was particularly evident across the accounts provided by managers in Bevcorp, which flags out the role of context. The comments below from Sally and Dana signal an understanding of relationships that transcends a narrow, short-term transactional perspective and focuses on longer term gains such as trust.

I find, sometimes in engaging in these conversations, which are not just transactional, there's more depth to them... because they're more about... actually, I think, can be very rewarding in terms of the relationships that you build out of them. So, you know, really thinking

through how you connect with people, I think, can really enhance the relationship. (Sally, middle manager, Bevcorp)

I think that one of the key differences is an acknowledgement that I need to build relationships more effectively. (...) So, again, the more you can actually learn to build relationships quickly... and I'm not talking about going out to lunch with people and socialise with them - I'm talking about having a relationship of trust and candour. (Dana, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Building alignment, another political engagement skill, was not only seen as relevant in fulfilling one's job – it was seen as the job itself. Far from viewing politics as isolated incidents or even enduring aspect in organizational life, the perception at this stage is that politics are embedded in the job responsibilities participants were tasked with. This was clearly related to an increase in seniority. When asked about how politics come into play in her specific role, Dana answers:

This *is* my role. I think this is the core of leadership actually. The core of leadership is getting a group of people aligned to an end goal and all working towards that end goal. It's defining it, setting the vision, setting the outcome, setting the goal and then getting the organisation focused and aligned to deliver that. That's leadership for me. (Dana, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Colin stresses the same point and discusses his shift in mindset from seeing engagement in politics as a distraction to his job towards seeing it as the very essence of his job.

As I said originally I thought something I didn't want to do, let me just go in and get my job. Over time what I've realised to my detriment at times is this is actually just part of the job. Aligning people, getting common agenda, making sure personal agendas don't trump business agendas is just the leader's job - so that's my job. (Colin, senior manager, Bevcorp)

There was also evidence of increased **versatility** in exerting political influence. After a period of being consumed with the fact that certain political behaviours did not feel natural – typical for the previous Stage - participants seemed to have grown comfortable with the idea of flexing their approach, depending on the people and the situation they were faced with.

I think it's always helpful to know the individuals that you're dealing with, and I don't think you can assume that one size will fit all, in terms of how you interact or approach people. (Corrine, senior manager, Bevcorp)

I think the most powerful thing is being able to meet people on their level. So I could be the most senior person, but I can talk to the most junior person and meet them on their level and they'll understand what they're talking about and they'll go away feeling valued. (Mike, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Heather for instance discusses how she varies her approach when relating to her managers. Interestingly, by talking and reflecting during the interview, she appears to become more aware of her versatile approach and her ability to 'play the game'.

I suppose, with my managers, one of my managers, I'm very open and honest. I bounce everything off him. You know, if I'm trying to write an email on a Sunday evening, I can send him a text message and he'll say, 'Yeah, I'll call you back in a minute,' and we'll talk through it together. With the other one, I will give him what I think he needs to know. So I won't hold anything back from him, but I'm not as transparent. Because I know that, on his agenda, it's, for example, to try and reduce my headcount because I generate the lowest amount of revenue. The styles are maybe quite different with different groups of people. I suppose I am learning to play the game. I've just realised... I think the fact that I have multiple styles that I work with different people, says that, probably, I do play the game more than I think I do. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

A greater acceptance and display of versatility did not necessarily mean that participants were ready to engage in any type of political behaviour. In effect, versatile influence was only evident as participants also had a greater sense of **authenticity** when engaging in politics. In other words, an inner sense of coherence allowed participants to vary their approach to politics while still feeling themselves.

So I won't spend my time developing very technical aspects, I will now focus my development on the softer side of things, which is the relationship building, and how do I effectively communicate, and how do I effectively influence, and how can I best put myself forward to be seen as those people who inspire me in that. And my honesty, and my integrity, and my authenticity shines through and it shines through in a natural, easy manner, and that others can visually see. (Henry, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Authenticity appeared to be a greater concern for women compared to men, particularly among managers from Semcom. As pointed out in the previous section, several female managers commented on a perceived incompatibility between political action and the female gender role (as defined by normative expectations). Their sense of authenticity hinged upon this. What emerged as defining for this third Stage was the ability to overcome or cope with the embedded masculinity of political behaviours. Contrasting views discussed in Stage two about politics being 'a man's thing', a few of the more senior female managers appeared to have found a way to navigate the gendered complexities of political engagement. They remained, however, aware of how gender may come into play when engaging in politics. For example, Heather discusses the risk of being seen as threatening or aggressive because of being a woman, thus showing an explicit concern related to stereotype threat.

I suppose I'm aware when I do it that how they perceive me is as an aggressive woman rather than an aggressive manager. When you know that's how people see you, you tailor the way you speak to them. So I

can be so unbelievably nice it makes you feel sick... but still get my point across. (Heather, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Having said that, she then goes on to dismantle the assumption that politics are a masculine endeavour, suggesting that pervasive gender prejudice leads men to underestimate or ignore female managers as viable political players.

I think you can be genuine and political at the same time. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

I think men and women can play politics equally well. Where women are winning more at the moment is there are less of us in management. A lot of the men are still quite arrogant to the fact that men are better than women. That is the harsh reality, so they don't see us doing it. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

Raising a similar point, Amy acknowledges that the ability to influence is generally seen as a male strength, while stressing nevertheless the developmental potential in women.

I just think sometimes the ability to influence is often seen as quite a male strength. (...) it's something that women probably think they're not good at but with a bit of coaching it turns out that they can be. (Amy, middle manager, Semcom)

Generic comments were made about the role of gender in managers' experience with politics. Typical patterns of response emerged. First, male managers in Semcom simply did not see how gender could come into play, as Harry's quote demonstrates:

I, personally, couldn't say that there would be a difference, at least not with what I've witnessed. I might just not have the right antennas to pick up, but if I look around at the male, female colleagues that I have I do see similarities. It might be just because they're all [Semcom] brain-washed, that could easily be the case, that we all have a pretty similar

way of working. I mean, we all have the same training classes, we all have the same code of conduct. (Harry, middle manager, Semcom)

Second, a few female managers in Bevcorp did comment on generic gender differences in the use of power and influence, which may come into play when individuals engage in politics. There was a consensus that men are more aggressive in their political pursuits, a view expressed by Sally in the fragment below. Her comment about ‘being able to look in the mirror’ also alludes to the notion of integrity. Defining personal ethical boundaries was often intertwined with a sense of authenticity in participants’ accounts.

In my experience, men can be a bit more ruthless. Everybody has their own kind of parameters within which they will operate and in my experience, women will stop shorter than men of heading towards ruthless. But, you know, the shades of grey that men will go into... whereas I probably wouldn't. I'm like ‘I wouldn't do that because I wouldn't be able to look at myself in the mirror’. I see men crossing that boundary more than women. (Sally, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Table 4-9 Highlights of Stage 3: Leveraging and Proficiency

Dimensions	Key developments
WILL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional and ethical: recognition of both functional and dysfunctional, as well as legitimate and illegitimate aspects of political engagement, but ability to make contextual judgements, thus transcending dualisms and ambivalences • Increased comfort, managing one's emotions in political situations
SKILL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness as perspective-taking and connection • Building relationships beyond transactional • Increased ability to create alignment as core part of one's job • Versatile influence refined • Authentic engagement
OVERALL MINDSET AND APPROACH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics as embedded aspects of the work itself, to be leveraged on • Pro-active: anticipation of political threats and opportunities, selective engagement

4.6.4 Summary

This section mapped out participants' developmental changes in both political will and skill. These changes were identified and described as leading to political maturation because they were linked, explicitly or implicitly⁶, to greater willingness and ability to engage in organizational politics. Based on these evolving behavioural and attitudinal patterns, I identified three stages of political maturation. Each stage described incremental changes along the key dimensions of political will and skill which corroborated crystallized into broader mindsets and approaches to politics.

The first stage, ***Naïveté and Discovery***, was characterized by a transition from obliviousness to politics to a basic political awareness. Certain naive assumptions related to meritocracy and rationality in organizational life were gradually dismantled as participants began to grasp the unwritten rules of the workplace. Attitudes pertaining to political will began to crystallize. Politics were mostly seen as dysfunctional and illegitimate. Early experiences with politics caused feelings of shock, confusion, and frustration. In terms of actual engagement, participants started to recognize the possibility or opportunity to resort to political influence through relationships, networks or versatile influence, but there was little attempt, if any, to employ or develop political engagement skills. Overall, politics were seen as illegitimate, disruptive, and accidental aspects of work, which need to be avoided or contained. Typical for this stage was a passive approach to politics, encompassing deliberate non-involvement, avoidance, or attempts to contain political situations.

The second stage, ***Coping and Endurance***, involved a diversification and polarization of attitudes and behaviours related to politics. While participants remained alert to the dysfunctional sides of politics, they were also increasingly aware of the functional benefits of political engagement. There was evidence of dualism and ambivalence along the three dimensions of political will, which meant that politics were perceived as simultaneously functional and/or

⁶ The distinction between implicit and explicit accounts as evidence trails of political maturation was discussed in the Data Analysis section of the Methodology chapter.

dysfunctional, right and/or wrong, and pleasant and/or stressful. There was however visible emotional discomfort, frustration and turmoil, especially among the female managers from Semcom. Developmental milestones in political skill corresponded to a refinement in political awareness, synonymous with the ability to read motives and diagnose competing agendas which obstruct one's personal goals. In addition, there was practice and development at the level of political engagement skills, particularly in building networks and relationships. Resistance to flexing one's approach to influence indicated little versatility. Underpinning that was a sense that engagement in politics required individuals to behave inauthentically, an issue particularly salient among Semcom's female managers. Overall, participants increasingly saw politics as constant aspects of work, fraught with complexities and ambivalences, which needed to be coped with or endured. The typical approach was a reactive one, which entailed sometimes resistance or challenge, sometimes reluctant engagement, and other times tentative engagement in certain political behaviours.

The third stage, ***Leveraging and Proficiency***, corresponded to a transition from a conflicted and polarized take on politics toward a certain appeasement and a sense of proficiency in dealing with political situations. Participants appeared to have transcended the dualisms and ambivalences of the prior stage. While there was still a clear recognition of both functional and dysfunctional, as well as legitimate and illegitimate aspects of political engagement, there was an increased expression of a more neutral, relativistic view of politics, and the ability to make contextual judgements about the nature of political engagement. Participants mentioned as a developmental milestone the ability to manage one's immediate emotional reaction to politics. Refinement along the dimensions of political skill was conveyed by several qualitative changes. First, awareness was understood not only as ability to diagnose agendas at stake in a given situation, but as perspective-taking and deeper connection with the other person's views, needs, and motives. Building relationships and networks sometimes went beyond a transactional approach, particularly for participants in Bevcorp. Creating alignment was increasingly seen as a core part of one's job. Participants were more open to experiment

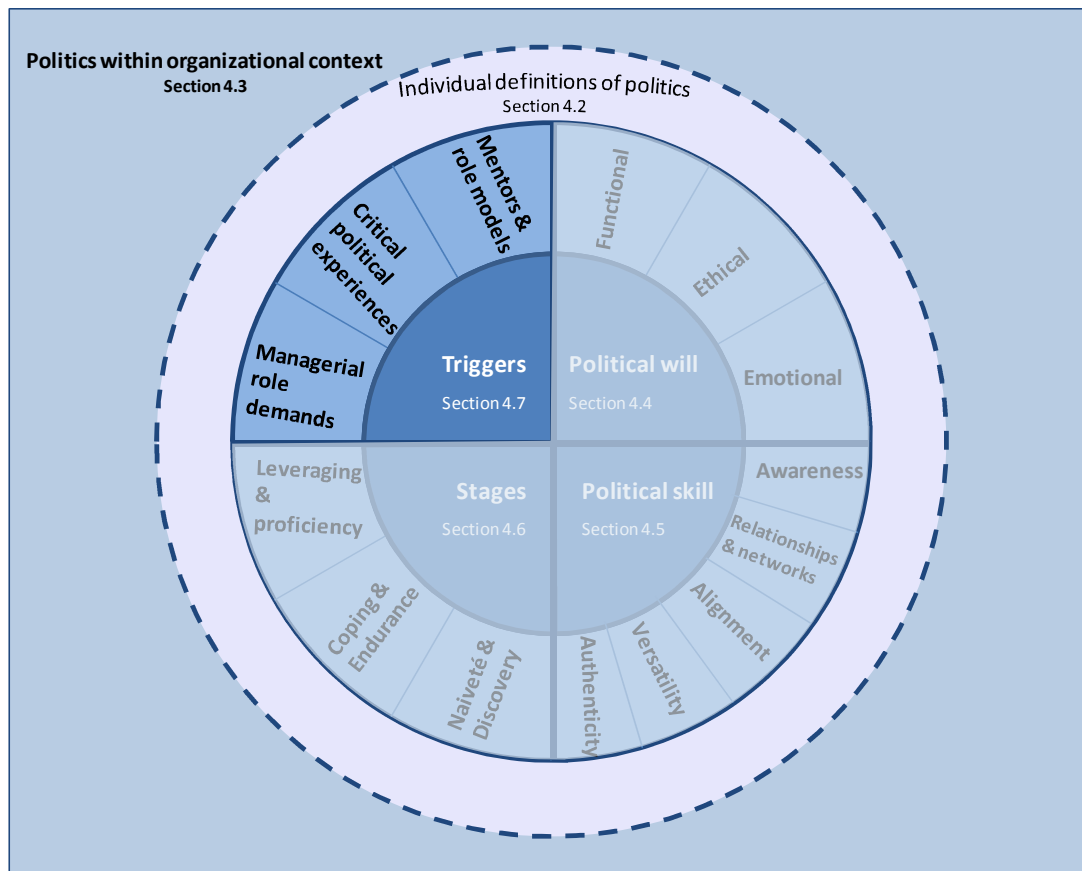
with various ways of engaging in politics, which led to increased versatility of their influence skills. At the same time, there was indication that individuals had resolved many of the struggles related to authenticity in political engagement. Overall, politics were seen as an embedded aspect of the work itself, which needed to be strategically managed and leveraged on. The typical approach was a pro-active one, relying on anticipation of political threats and opportunities and selective and measured engagement in politics.

This section described and substantiated empirically the sequential nature of developmental changes in managers' political will and skill, leading to political maturation. In addition to providing an indication of these developmental patterns, the analysis of the interviews also brought insight into some of the factors generating these changes. These triggers of political maturation are discussed in the next section of the current chapter.

4.7 Triggers of political maturation

This last section of the Findings chapter (see Figure 4-6 below) discusses the triggers identified as important in shaping managers' views and approach with regards to organizational politics, thus enabling the maturation journey described in the previous section. I identified three categories of developmental triggers: managerial role demands, critical political experiences, and mentors and role models. These triggers were critical not only because they exposed participants to additional political experiences, but also because they provided them with opportunities to make sense of their experience with politics, and therefore gradually change their views. Certain gender differences emerged, suggesting that the learning experiences related to politics tend to be different for women compared to men. Given that these experiences are inevitably context-dependent, the influence of organizational context is also discussed in relation to the triggers identified.

Figure 4-6 Overview of findings: Triggers of political maturation



4.7.1 Managerial role demands

Most participants stressed the idea that politics are more frequent as one progresses on the organizational hierarchy. Both male and female participants commented that taking on managerial roles made them realize the importance of being politically aware and discover the benefits of engaging in politics, as well as the costs of opting out. Due to their increased complexity and relational nature, managerial roles seemed to have shaped participants' political will and skill by raising awareness of the necessity of engaging in politics in order to accomplish team or organizational goals. Both Sam and Heather comment on this:

Once you step out of a junior role where you're process and procedure driven and your job is to complete x-number of tasks and you have to

start then going out to get people's support. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

I think secondly just by the very nature, when you become more senior you have to deliver through others, yeah? So therefore it means that you have to develop the skill more and more. And particularly doing the sort of role that I'm doing now... It actually stretches that to another level. (Sam, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Along with seniority of managerial roles, there was also a sense of responsibility to engage in politics as a manager for the benefit of the team. Carol discusses how this has helped her refine her political skills.

I think also now I'm a line manager and there's a need to make sure my team are happy, make sure they're performing because if they're performing I'll be held accountable, there's more of a direct impact on me if I don't handle it [politics] properly, which means that means by necessity I've become better at it. So, it's practice as well. (Carol, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Vincent explicates how a greater emphasis on managing people has made him more reflective when assessing political situations. He stresses in particular the role of listening in developing political competence.

I think I have higher responsibilities with seniority. I needed to become more reflective. (...) It's upon me to become more reflective, more judging about situations and more listening. Actually listening and all of that has helped me navigate, be more savvy in relation to politics. (Vincent, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Participants' experiences in their managerial roles seemed to be, to a certain extent, shaped by context. Confirming the assertions made at the outset of this chapter about the role of organizational context, there were different nuances in the accounts of managers from the two organizations, due to the more collaborative versus competitive cultures in Bevcorp and Semcom respectively.

For instance, Heather discusses her increased insight into the acerbic competition for resources and the 'trash behind the scenes'.

I saw a big difference eight months ago when I took this job on. So I'd always been aware of the politics within customers because I dealt with it. You don't realise how much of it goes on, how much fighting there is, how much, you know, fighting for resource, fighting for cash, fighting for territory. You don't realise how much trash there is behind the scenes. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

Perhaps not surprisingly, she then construes as her managerial responsibility to engage in politics on behalf of their team, with an almost protective role.

Once my point has been made, I know my team's safe. They're protected. They can go and achieve the things they need to without being a part of this. And then I will just back off and say 'Enough's enough'. (Heather, senior manager, Semcom)

Therefore, while participants in both companies found that managerial role demands required them to be more mindful about the political landscape and more skilful at navigating it, there were different nuances in what exactly this entailed between the two groups.

4.7.2 Critical political experiences

Most participants said that one of the major learning factors in terms of politics were key experiences faced throughout their career, when failure to read or to handle politics lead to some sort of negative outcome, either for the individual or for the team or when they had a chance to experience or witness the benefits of engaging in politics successfully. The incidents most commonly mentioned as triggers of political development had to do with: claiming merit, impression management (especially raising personal and team visibility), establishing coalitions and developing networks, being able to understand complex agendas and adjust the influence strategies to various decision-makers. For instance,

talking about the importance of importance of establishing coalitions and influencing via multiple channels, Andrew said:

I learned a lot of that in politics because we failed a number of times, trying to influence a single point of contact. (Andrew, senior manager, Semcom)

Just as Andrew's quote was indicative of a trial-and-error approach, Dana explains how she gained in versatility by experience and reflection. She recalls how failing to achieve results in a new role made her question the value of always being diplomatic – an influence approach she had been using successfully for years. Feeling frustrated and having a sense that she was 'treading water', Dana came to appreciate the value of being more confrontational:

So my conclusion was 'you have to use all the tools in the shed'. I've been spending so much time running around trying to keep everybody aligned and using my diplomacy skills that I was slowing down. And so then I said 'Okay, fine, we've now moved to a situation where I'm going to need to use a different skill'... and the words that I used were 'create conflict'. (Dana, senior manager, Bevcorp)

While the interviews suggested that most of the critical experiences related to politics occurred on the job, there were also accounts of less typical situations. For example, Colin recalls as a distinct trigger having been asked in a recruitment interview about his approach to politics, which then prompted further reflection on the topic.

I think the trigger was when I was interviewing for a job maybe 13-14 years ago and the person who was interviewing me got into politics, 'How do you deal with politics?' and I said, 'No, I just don't like politics, I like doing my job.' And she said, 'Well actually I think it's just a normal part of business'. And I hadn't thought about that. So that was the starting point of making me think about it differently. (Colin, senior manager, Bevcorp)

A majority of the critical experiences discussed by participants essentially conveyed a realization of the critical role the informal, interpersonal aspects have on business processes and decisions. Deriving from this was the acknowledgement and an attempt to employ political skills that allowed participants to better understand others' motives and agendas, and to use that awareness as a platform for engaging with them in a savvy manner. Kristy's story on her personal learning about the power of relationships is representative in this respect.

When I used to work in the African business, it was clearly all down to relationships. Like the only way to get things done was to ring the general managers and kind of convince them. Because the general managers in our African business held the power. If you didn't convince the general managers, and they sometimes had to convince our local shareholders, you weren't going to get anything done. So I learnt that through experience. (Kristy, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Carol provides another example by recalling how she ignored the importance of getting buy-in and support before the actual decision-making meeting. The learning was not only about the necessity to creating alignment, but also about the most astute and effective way to do so. Carol commented that while the whole point of meetings is to allow for ideas to be collectively discussed by the leadership team, in order to reach a decision, in reality decision-making does not occur like this. She learned that sometimes 'people work behind scenes' to influence decisions and recounted an instance when she failed to understand and use this at her own advantage:

One time I did not have the individual conversations with people behind the scenes, innocently went in and put my proposal forward, to find that all of the others had had a behind the scenes conversation and decided in advance that they would disagree with me before they had even heard what I was going to say. (Carol, middle manager, Bevcorp)

There was an interesting gender pattern among participants in Semcom, where several female participants mentioned gendered incidents when talking about experiences that shaped their political will. These were related to male-dominated cultures (old boys' networks, golf club socializing), tokenism, or gender stereotypes in the workplace. A typical example is Alice's story about seeing male colleagues getting promoted before her because they had been more strategic in using impression-management, a political behaviour which women are often uncomfortable displaying.

I had someone in my team who was not doing much more than me, I would even say that I was quite proud of my results while I thought his were less important. And to me he was playing politics, like spending a lot of time inside the building, discussing with managers, while I was with my customers. Then there was some training with some EMEA⁷ managers and he was there to discuss with them, even if to me it was nothing to say, just to get known... And usually he was working at the questions that he should be asking if the opportunity came to speak to them... And then at the end of the year, he got promoted and I was not and I thought it was not something really fair. And I discussed that with my manager, and he said look, you are not visible enough, you do the right stuff, but if I'm talking to the EMEA organization, they don't know much about you. They might know the results, but who has been accomplishing that? (Alice, middle manager, Semcom)

Feeling that she lost out because of not playing a political game defined in masculine terms, Alice went on to explain how she became savvier and more proactive about impression management in light of the perceived functional benefits, instead of relying on her line manager to promote her work. Along the same lines, Irene described the challenge of establishing credibility as a female manager in what she called a 'macho culture' with 'a rugby team mentality'.

⁷ EMEA = Europe Middle East and Africa

So, very, very strong personalities and very strong biases simply towards gender and I think there were times meetings happened, I didn't know about the meetings, I wasn't involved in the meetings... Or it was like, you know, 'you can do the pretty things, you can feed up the agenda for the meetings, or you can do the logistics, or you can pick out the dinner menu', this type of things. But it really took me years, couple of years, actually to be perceived as an equal to the country managers, all male. (Irene, senior manager, Semcom)

Further on, when describing experiences that made her more politically astute, Amy talks about a missed opportunity for promotion a few years ago, which she clearly perceives to be linked to gender. In doing so, she describes a male-dominated work environment, where men made biased decisions when it came to assessing how promotable women were. She particularly recalls that the key decision-maker had unsubstantiated 'preconceived notions' about her, which made her withdraw from the promotion track. Amy estimates that ever since that incident, Semcom had become a more equalitarian working environment:

. I thought well I really can't, I don't want to put myself through the agony of going through an appointment process where you have to be interviewed by lots of different people if quite clearly somebody has decided I'm not going to get the job. So I withdrew from the job. But I think that was very disappointing to me and when I've talked to other women they had similar experiences. And I think [Semcom] has realised that certain things like that were happening and has improved things so that we do have... women do get positively considered and men can't make decisions like that without data. (Amy, middle manager, Semcom)

Although Amy mentions progress in Semcom's approach to gender diversity, suggesting that incidents such as her missed promotion are no longer an issue at the present, she comments further on in the interview that socializing around typically male activities still represents a barrier for women's access to the informal reins of power.

I think there is an issue that men tend to group together socially... and play golf. And a lot of decisions are made really when they're doing things like that. So it is quite challenging as a woman to break through sometimes and influence their thinking. (Amy, middle manager, Semcom)

She then goes into describing at length her recent experience and the strategies she uses to cope with this masculine culture, ranging from learning to play golf and joining the 'guys' to downplaying her expertise at golf and asking for unnecessary help on the golf field to establish rapport with her male colleagues in a non-threatening way. The gendered nature of the incidents that triggered women's political awakening suggests that, at least in Semcom, female managers experienced politics through the lens of gender disparities in the workplace, therefore from a more precarious power position than their male counterparts.

However, experiences related to missed promotion opportunities due to insufficient impression management were mentioned by participants from Bevcorp as well, but did not appear to be gender-specific, as Colin's quote demonstrates.

I think there were other triggers. So in my early career not developing relationships with people that would be influential in when and where I got promoted and as a consequence irrespective of what I had done, they didn't see it and therefore I didn't get promoted at the time in the way I was expecting. So that's a pretty big wake-up in terms of the downside consequences - even if you do a great job, you're not establishing strong relationships. (Colin, senior manager, Bevcorp)

It must be stressed that while participants were able to mention specific examples of specific incidents that triggered learning about politics, most of them emphasized the incremental, additive nature of experiences supporting their willingness and ability to engage in politics. In commenting on this point,

several participants hinted to an age window around late twenties, which was seen to be a critical exposure time to the first political experiences.

It just was, you know, probably between the age of about 25 and 30 I figured out that, actually, you know, probably little by little, I started to reframe my thinking and then I'd go and experience, then I'd try something in a different way and it would work. And so, then my mind would be more open. So I don't have any kind of big unmasking experiences. (Sally, middle manager, Bevcorp)

The accounts also suggested that experience in and of itself is perhaps not sufficient, but needs to be paralleled by openness to reflect, make sense and learn from experiences with politics – most of them painful to begin with. Hugh's comments provide such an example.

So you learn over time, sometimes through just basic experience mostly of failure, when it's all fallen apart and you're just wondering why isn't this there and when you can just ... you learn to drill the 'why, why, why are things the way they are'? Suddenly there you go, eventually it becomes clear. And it's usually a case of, as I said, it doesn't fit with somebody's agenda right now. (Hugh, middle manager, Bevcorp)

The next section will thus discuss the role of other people in helping participants learn from their experience with politics.

4.7.3 Mentors and role models

Another major trigger of political development consisted of learning from or through other people, and particularly from mentors (formal and informal) and role models. Participants framed this learning by referring to coaching, advice, conversations or simply examples of good and bad managers they had observed engaging in politics. Interactions with mentors or coaches seemed to provide participants with an opportunity to make sense of their personal experiences with politics, indicating interdependence between these two triggers. For example, Simon describes his own learning about politics by

drawing a parallel between the experiences he had with the previous employer and Bevcorp. He contrasts the competitive culture of his prior consultancy firm, a 'more blatantly and overtly political' workplace, to Bevcorp, which he describes as a 'pretty nice organisation to work for' because 'you never feel you're going to get a knife in the back if you happen to disagree with someone'. Recalling how he colluded with the 'cut-throat approach to politics' required to be successful as a consultant, Simon explains that coaches had a critical role in helping him reconsider the way he engaged in politics, by bringing 'a degree of distance and pragmatism'. He reflects back on a time where despite evident career successes, he was unhappy and identifies politics as the root cause of that state of facts:

The way in which I was navigating organizational politics at that time ran completely contrary to my core values as an individual, you know? I don't want to drive people to dislike me, I don't want to treat people unfairly or with disdain, I don't want my success to be defined relative to other people. I don't, but for a long time that was my perspective. And the coaches really helped me to understand that and of course step forward from hindsight. (Simon, senior manager, Bevcorp)

For Simon, these conversations were an opportunity to reflect on some of the ethical aspects of his involvement in politics, thus shaping his political will. The comment about navigating politics in a way that is consistent with personal 'core values' also signals the importance of authenticity. While Simon's case refers specifically to external coaches, most participants who mentioned this type of trigger appeared to rely on their line manager for sharing and advice with regards to politics. Carol for instance describes her manager as having two roles in supporting her learning around politics: providing a good example and thus being a role-model in terms of political engagement, but also acting as a 'sounding board' and giving her advice, and therefore mentoring her into navigating political situations.

I think also having a line manager who's very skilled in company politics ... and I don't mean that in any derogatory way. Learning by example,

watching him. And also because I trust him, I will speak with him once a week and if there's something that I'm thinking, 'Okay, I need to take a political game on this,' I might talk it through with him. Get his view on how I should handle it and how I should go about having the conversation, how should I phrase it, using him as a sounding board. (Carol, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Discussing about the type of support bosses or coaches can provide with regards to politics, Sally (MM, Bevcorp) state that 'really good coaching holds the mirror up', allowing one to reflect on their challenges and personal style. The same notion comes across from Dana's comments below:

There have been various people in my career, including my current boss who has been very helpful as a coach in helping me see that. (...) If you've got great coaching from your line manager, or from your peers, they can actually point out to you where 'You know what? You were in that meeting and, you know, you did this. If you had just thought about it from this way it might have been more effective'. (Dana, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Gender differences emerged when participants from Semcom tackled the role of mentoring in equipping individuals to deal with politics. Both male and female respondents spoke about the importance of being mentored into politics, as the quotes below demonstrate. Isaac particularly stresses the role of a mentor in helping to develop political awareness, a foundational dimension of political skill.

For me this is the big achievement for a politician – it's hard to understand people, hard to play... (...) play, use people to manage your career. If you don't do that, you are totally lost. And you need a good mentor to explain that to you when you are 21 years old, and you are new in a company. If you don't understand it very quickly, you will be a pawn. (Isaac, junior manager, Semcom)

I'm quite lucky in that two of the people that support me (...) they're both extremely experienced female managers and they've both given me a lot of coaching around this [politics]. (Heather, senior manager, Bevcorp)

However, unlike Heather, several female managers said they lacked mentors and pointed out how the need for a political mentor or the lack thereof led them to take particular care of educating their own staff into politics. In contrast, none of the male managers mentioned this aspect. While this does not necessarily mean that men did not mentor their staff into politics, it suggests that the idea of purposefully being a political mentor was less salient to male managers.

Actually it's the thing I spend most of my time talking about with my team, actually coaching them on how they influence people. I don't use the word 'politics' because I think it's a very negative word, but I talk to them about how they're building up their network? How are they talking to people? How are they maintaining relationships? How are they going to call in a favour? (...) I mean partly why I do it is because I wished somebody had when I was joining. (Laura, middle manager, Semcom)

... it's a skill that you acquire over time I think. I think you have either a natural ability and you kind of know what to do or else you watch and observe other people. And I think if you're a woman you're very dependent on a manager really guiding you because it isn't always natural. So, I put quite a lot of emphasis with my team on improving their influencing skills and giving them guidance. I don't call it 'politics', I call it how to influence people and give them advice every day on how to handle certain situations. (Amy, middle manager, Semcom)

The analysis of the interviews also indicated that a frequently mentioned learning mechanism for participants was emulating other people's approach to politics, which thus became role models in this respect. Hugh for instance expresses his admiration for an individual with an astute understanding of others and excellent influencing ability. This suggests that by observing other

politically skilled individuals, allowed participants to gradually identify the critical ingredients of political skill.

So what are the styles of these particular people, how does it work? So (a) you're asking people, (b) you're watching particular people and how they behave. And I would remark on, you know, a particular individual who lots of people would regard as very political - but that's in a sort of career enhancing sense as opposed to a business delivery. But that same person is very, very skilled at finding the angle to sell the point that they are making to influence things in a particular way. Very skilled at it. And he would clearly be very aware of how the guy's mind is ticking, what he's got on his mind and how to play on that in what he is doing. (Hugh, middle manager, Bevcorp)

In a similar vein, by observing her boss, Rachel seems to have understood the value of awareness and to have witnessed how one can engage in political influence with versatility and integrity.

When I first came here I had a boss who was brilliant, very good at understanding people and the politics of the organisation and how to make that work for you without behaving in a manner that you would later regret. She just knew who to talk to and how to engage them, what to say to them that would get them engaged in a way that you wanted to, rather than necessarily putting their back up. And you have to approach people differently because different people have different agendas and therefore you have to recognise that and accept that it's not a question of one-size fits all. (Rachel, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Further on, Henry has learned by example that the ability to build relationships and influence stakeholders is a more powerful skill for a manager than sheer technical competence. This pertains to some of the naive assumptions identified in the first stage of the political maturation journey.

I suppose, at that particular point in time, that shift had started for me - focusing on the ability to build relationships with a view to that's the best path to success. I suppose it was probably the first time I've seen anybody who was very good at what they did, but technically was probably not the best; and I'm talking from an accounting sense. At no point in time, did he ever hold himself up to be an exceptional accountant. Of course, he knew his stuff to a degree. But I've come across a lot more people with a far better grasp of the technicalities associated with accounting than what he did. But what he did have was an exceptional ability to motivate and energise those around him, and to build relationships with stakeholders. (Henry, middle manager, Bevcorp)

Again, an interesting gender pattern emerged in the accounts of participants from Semcom, whereby women suggested that they had few role models to emulate in terms of politics. Several women were simply unable to identify individuals whose approach to politics they appreciated. Perhaps not surprisingly, these were the ones with the most negative and conflicted views about politics, typical for the second stage of the maturation journey. The few women who had benefited from positive role models and mentors in terms of politics were also the ones with less negative attitudes towards politics. They had a clear sense of who were their political mentors or what their role modelling strategies were when it comes to emulating political behaviours.

My old boss was very ... crafty I'll call him, and he would work a way around things and never actually be the one that said no to anything or yes to anything. But yet he was incredibly powerful and strong. My new boss is very different in his approach and I think you learn things from all of them, not that you should do them the way they're doing but you can learn what you like and don't like and what's successful and not successful out of all of those things. (Sarah, middle manager, Semcom)

Not only did male managers have an easier time identifying clear models to follow or specific behaviours to reproduce in terms of handling politics, but they

also spoke about those role models in more enthusiastic terms. The excerpts below provide a flavour of their tone.

I learned with a very good guy so I try somehow to reproduce when I do politics. What I love about this person is... in fact, he taught me everything. (Isaac, junior manager, Semcom)

Those who are able also to understand how [Semcom] works, those who are able to find the right people to support them, those people are really successful. And well, I have a few people like that in my organisation. I have also a few peers and a few managers who I really see as the one using politics in a very positive way and helping them to achieve results. (...) Some people can really optimise their activities and talk to the right people in the right way to get the right results this is really good. And that's what I admire. I admire really understanding of the organisation structure and understanding of whom to get involved and what kind of arguments to use in order to get closer to the objective that we are setting in front of us. (Adrian, senior manager, Semcom)

Therefore, while mentors, coaches and role models were identified by a majority of participants as critical learning triggers, it was evident that access to and experiences with people who could play this role were different across participants.

4.7.4 Summary

This section presented the learning triggers identified as critical in shaping participants' political will and skill and thus supporting their political maturation. Three categories of triggers were discussed - managerial role demands, critical political experiences, and mentors and role models – signalling the interdependence between experiential and relational learning with respect to politics. These triggers were predominantly discussed by participants as related to their experiences within their current organizations. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, participants had at least five years tenure within Semcom

or Bevcorp, so it is perhaps not surprising that the most salient learning experiences recalled had mostly occurred in their current organizational settings. However, it must be stressed that none of these triggers is strictly related to a specific context and that participants also drew on experiences they had in previous workplaces. In addition, while these work-related triggers emerged as most important across the sample, a few participants also mentioned developmental influences outside work that shaped their views on politics: family values and education, formal education⁸, or reading. Table 4-10 below summarizes the findings pertaining to the triggers of political maturation.

Table 4-10 Triggers of political maturation

Triggers	Explanation
Managerial role demands	Learning about politics through managerial responsibilities that confronted individuals with the political complexities of the organization, making them realize the benefits of engaging in politics, and the costs of opting out. Examples: allocating resources, aligning agendas, raising the team's visibility.
Critical political experiences	Learning about politics through work and career-related experiences not directly related to managerial roles, in which failure to read or to handle politics led to negative outcomes or successful engagement in politics led to beneficial outcomes. Examples: claiming merit, impression management for career progression, leveraging on networks and informal coalitions to exert influence.
Mentors and role models	Learning about politics through individuals who acted as positive or negative examples, who provided a 'sounding board' in making sense of personal experiences with politics, or who offered advice on how to navigate politics. Examples: bosses, more senior people, or peers.

⁸ For example, one participant had a degree in political science and confessed to have always drawn parallels between Politics (as party/government politics) and organizational politics.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

5 DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter articulates the theoretical contribution of the study by situating the findings in the relevant bodies of literature. While in the previous chapter I described and substantiated empirically the key constructs and themes identified, in this chapter I aim to provide a more holistic and theoretically-informed interpretation of these findings. The chapter begins by providing a summary of the findings in section 5.2. Further on, four key theoretical contributions are discussed. In section 5.3 I discuss the new conceptualization of political will proposed by this thesis and demonstrate its added explanatory power compared to current dispositional approaches in the field. I also examine the conceptual links between the dimensions of political will proposed by this study and prior research. Section 5.4 reviews how the dimensionality of political skill identified in this study relates to extant models of political will. With regards to political skill, the theoretical contribution this study consists in refining the dimensionality of the concept, as well as providing a developmental perspective. This developmental perspective is discussed in section 5.5 of the chapter, which proposes a model of political maturation, thereby articulating the third theoretical contribution offered by this thesis. The model integrates findings about the stages of maturation in political will and skill and about the triggers responsible for this maturation. This novel developmental perspective is discussed by drawing on literature in the field of organizational politics and beyond. Further on, the fourth theoretical contribution of the thesis is outlined in section 5.6., which unpacks in more detail the significance of gender in understanding managerial political will, skill and maturation. In doing so, the theoretical contribution of this study is highlighted by drawing on relevant literature in the field of gender in management. Finally, in section 5.7 of the chapter I examine the theoretical contributions in light of the philosophical perspective and the methodology employed, demonstrating the philosophical integrity of the study and the internal coherence of its claims. Section 5.8 concludes the chapter by summarizing the contributions discussed.

5.2 Summary of findings

Chapter 4 reported the empirical findings of the study, which addressed the following research questions:

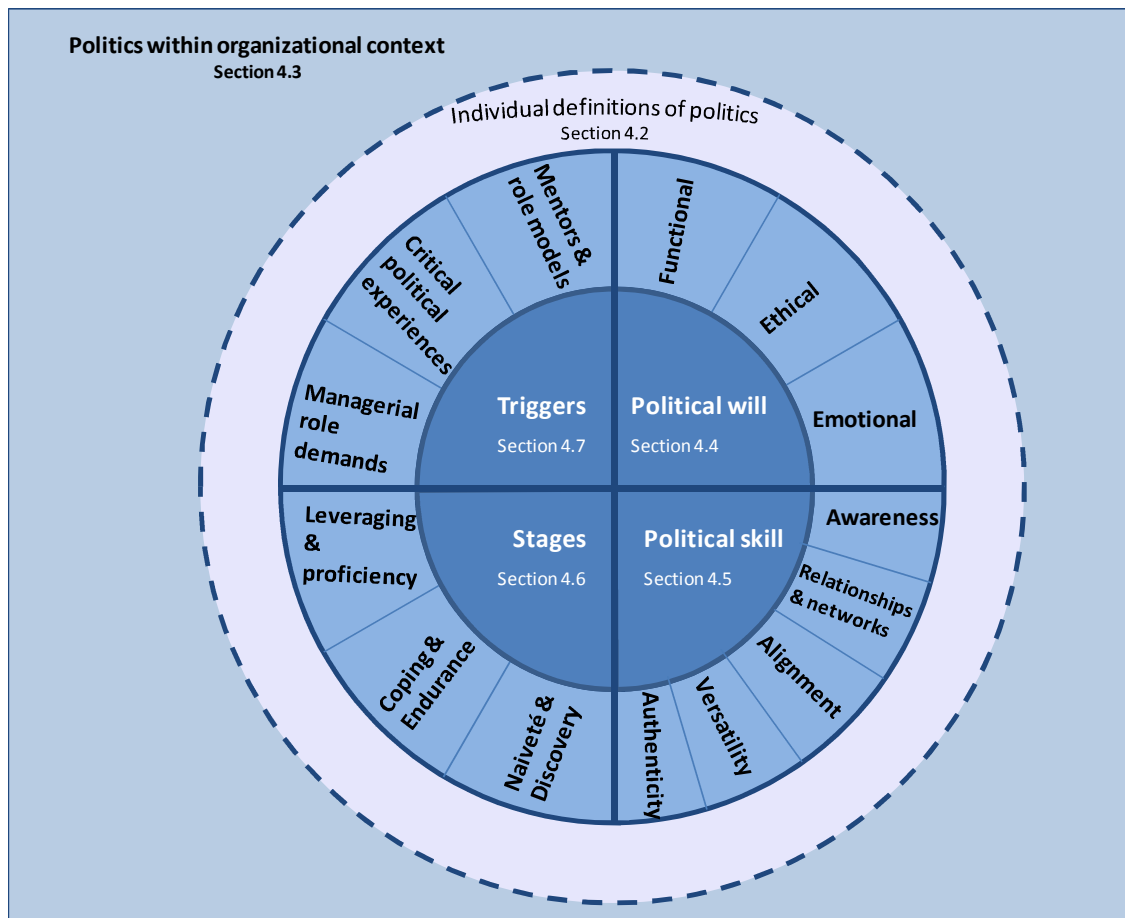
RQ1: What attitudes toward organizational politics and engagement in politics comprise political will for male and female managers?

RQ2: What does skilled political engagement entail for male and female managers?

RQ3: How do political will and skill develop for male and female managers?

Figure 5-1 reiterates the overview of the findings. In order to address the research questions, I commenced the Findings chapter by discussing how participants defined 'organizational politics' (section 4.2) and by outlining the nature of politics in their respective organizational contexts (section 4.3). The most recurrent themes emerging from the analysis of the interviews conveyed several shared meanings of the notion of 'organizational politics'. Generally, participants understood politics to be the by-product of conflicting or hidden agendas in the workplace. Politics were seen as an informal route to exerting influence, therefore related to power dynamics in the workplace. Given their un-prescribed nature, politics were often viewed as subtle and concealed, albeit pervasive, aspects of organizational life. While politics were often associated with game-playing and self-interest, they were equally considered a way of getting things done and thus achieving business objectives.

Figure 5-1 Copy of Figure 1-1: Overview of findings



Beyond these views which pertained to participants' generic definition of organizational politics, the findings also revealed a number of contextual characteristics relevant to understanding politics as related to the organizational settings in which participants were immersed. A comparative analysis of politics into context was provided in section 4.2.1. This analysis indicated both similarities and differences between Bevcorp and Semcom's organizational cultures. Inevitably, due to the corporate values and narratives specific to each company, there were differences in the terms used by participants to describe the political complexities of their workplace. However some common themes emerged. Both organizations operated in a matrix structure which raised the issue of competing loyalties and overlapping structures of authority and influence. Both companies endeavoured to foster an entrepreneurial culture

which empowered employees. In Bevcorp, this was framed as ‘freedom to succeed’, while in Semcom it was referred to as ‘risk-taking’. Participants in both companies described their culture as non-hierarchical, referring to a ‘democratic’ environment in Bevcorp, and invoking the ‘open door policy’ in Semcom. Some key differences emerged as well. Bevcorp appeared to have a more relationship-driven and consensual culture, which required managers to pro-actively build relationships and to seek alignment. In contrast, Semcom’s culture emerged as more confrontational, process-driven and task-focused. Finally, several female managers portrayed Semcom’s culture as masculine, while this did not emerge as an issue within Bevcorp.

Having established the meaning and the contextual nature of politics, subsequent sections of the Findings chapter addressed the core research issues tackled by the study. Specifically, section 4.3 presented the findings pertaining to the first research question. The investigation of political will as attitudes toward politics and toward political engagement enabled me to identify three dimensions of political will: functional, ethical and emotional. The functional dimension refers to managers’ beliefs about the functional or dysfunctional outcomes of organizational politics and political engagement. Participants recognized both the usefulness and the disruptive nature of politics. The ethical dimension comprises their judgements about the moral dilemmas posed by politics and political engagement. A range of opinions were expressed regarding the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ of political activity. The emotional dimension essentially conveyed participants’ affective reactions to political experiences, which ranged from positive to negative. These three dimensions of political will provided insight into which attitudes underpin managerial engagement in politics.

Section 4.4 presented the findings pertaining to the second research question. Five dimensions emerged as central to skilled political engagement: awareness, relationships and networks, building alignment, versatile influence and authenticity. While the first dimension appeared to be a very analytical one, the other four dimensions pertained to actual engagement in politics. The

dimensions were however inter-related and build on each other, portraying what skilled political engagement meant from the perspective of managers interviewed.

Finally, the third research question entailed examining developmental changes in political will and skill. In doing so, I identified evolving patterns in participants' attitudes toward politics and their ability to engage with it. This enabled me to delineate three stages of political maturation: Naiveté and Discovery, Coping and Endurance, and Leveraging and Proficiency (section 4.5). In addition to outlining these stages of political maturation, section 4.6 also identified key triggers of political maturation, namely managerial role demands, critical political experiences and mentors and role models. In the following sections, I discuss the theoretical significance of these findings and outline the contribution to knowledge of the study.

5.3 Conceptualizing political will

The review of literature revealed a need for further investigation into what drives and shapes the way male and female managers engage in organizational politics. This thesis aimed to go some way in addressing this need by tackling the concept of political will. In this section I explain how the conceptualization of political will proposed in this thesis make a theoretical contribution to micro perspectives in the field of organizational politics. I begin by highlighting in section 5.3.1 the limitations of dispositional approaches in understanding political engagement. I continue by stressing the added value of a non-dispositional approach to political will proposed in the current study (section 5.3.2). In section 5.3.3, I discuss the empirical findings of this study, which substantiate the proposed conceptualization of political will by mapping out three dimensions (functional, ethical, emotional). Section 5.3.4 provides a summary.

5.3.1 Limitations of dispositional approaches

The literature review indicated that up to date, scholars have adopted primarily dispositional approaches when attempting to identify individual antecedents of political behaviour. Defined as 'tendencies to respond to situations, or classes of situations in a particular, predetermined manner' (House, Shane and Herold, 1996), dispositions encompass personality characteristics, need states, values, preferences, and motives. The overall argument of dispositional perspectives in the study of organizational behaviour is that individuals possess certain mental states which shape their attitudes and behaviours in the workplace in a fairly enduring manner (Weiss and Adler, 1984). As demonstrated by the review of literature provided in section 2.3.3, in the field of organizational politics researchers have investigated a range of dispositional antecedents of political behaviour, such as need for power, need for achievement, intrinsic motivation, or Machiavellianism (Allen et al., 1979; Porter et al., 1981; Biberman, 1985; House, 1988; Zahra, 1989; Leary and Kowalski, 1990; Fandt and Ferris, 1990; Kirchmeyer, 1990; Treadway et al., 2005).

However, dispositional approaches have been severely criticized for their neglect of situational influences and for the implicit assumption that individuals behave in stable, consistent ways regardless of the organizational setting in which they operate (Davis-Blake and Pfeffer, 1989). After reviewing evidence evincing that organizational influences (processes, culture, job specificities) often override dispositional proclivities, Davis-Blake and Pfeffer request that 'dispositionalists who posit the existence of attitudinal and behavioural inertia must develop arguments about how and why attitudes and behavior are unchanging' (p. 388). Such arguments are currently absent in studies of organizational politics attempting to link the above mentioned dispositional factors to the presence or absence of certain political behaviours. This state of facts can arguably be explained by the implicit epistemological and methodological commitments shared by a majority of researchers in the field. As explained in the methodological chapter, consistent with a widespread positivistic perspective and a preference for quantitative methods, a majority of

studies have been more concerned with measuring certain dispositions through the use of tightly defined variables, and isolating their impact on political behaviours across contexts, rather than explaining how organizational contextual factors may shape those dispositions or behaviours.

5.3.2 A non-dispositional perspective on political will

This thesis set out to understand what drives managerial engagement in politics from a non-dispositional perspective, by exploring the notion of political will. In 1983, Mintzberg argued that effective political actors must possess both political will and political skill. This alerted scholars to the importance of examining both interest and desire to engage in politics, as well as ability to do so. Despite a persistent interest in individual antecedents of political engagement, there has been limited effort to refine and substantiate the concept of political will. Alluding to the notion of political will, Vredenburg and Maurer (1984) articulated a process view of organizational politics which entailed 'the decision to pursue goals politically'. In proposing a political model of managerial behaviour, Ferris et al. (1994) referred to political will as an important precursor of political behaviour and described it as 'propensity to behave politically'. Ammeter et al. (2002) developed a political theory of leadership, stating that 'a necessary antecedent condition contributing to leader political behavior is the desire or inclination to exercise influence' (p. 760), thus stressing again the criticality of political will. These three studies did not go far in conceptualizing political will, nor did they bring empirical support to elucidate the construct, given their conceptual nature. Treadway et al. (2005) conducted an empirical study investigating the relationship between political will, political skill and political behaviour. However, political will was defined and operationalized by resorting to the same dispositional measures (need for achievement and intrinsic motivation). Ever since, the construct lay dormant, with researchers ceremonially citing Mintzberg's intuitive distinction between will and skill.

My core argument is that political will needs to be understood by going beyond dispositional approaches. The first rationale concerns the inherent limitations of

dispositional approaches in general, as discussed above. In response to these critiques, some dispositionalists have been vehement in defending the cross-situational stability of dispositions (House et al., 1996). Regardless of how this endurance debate is settled, I propose that the explanatory power of dispositional perspectives remains limited when examining the issue of organizational politics in particular. This is chiefly due to the non-specificity of dispositional factors hypothesized to determine political behaviours. In other words, need for achievement and need for power may well be indicative of a person's generic appetite for power, but to which extent do they inform us about that person's willingness to engage in organizational politics as a distinctive form of power and influence? Thus, the central difficulty with dispositional approaches is that they have neglected individuals' personal views about politics in particular. Given the prevalence of politics at higher organizational levels, and the controversial nature of politics, this is critically relevant when attempting to unpack managers' willingness (or lack thereof) to engage in politics.

Consequently, in this thesis I proposed a new conceptualization of political will, which relied on exploring managers' attitudes toward organizational politics and toward their personal engagement in politics. The conceptual framing of this approach was broadly informed by psychological theories of attitudes. Defined as classes of favourable or unfavourable evaluative answers toward attitudinal objects (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Fabrigar et al., 2005), attitudes differ from dispositions in that they pertain to specific issues salient and personally relevant in individuals' life (i.e. political ideologies, social groups, etc). That organizational politics constitute a distinct attitudinal object for managers is hardly debatable, given the prevalence of politics at managerial levels. Therefore, the doctoral study set out to refine the concept of political will by exploring managers' attitudes toward politics and toward engaging in politics. In virtue of its focus on attitudes toward engaging in politics, this conceptualization of political will entails an intentional, volitional aspect as well.

The added-value of this approach consists in factoring in individual meanings, opinions, attitudes regarding the issue of organizational politics and political involvement when ascertaining managers' proclivity to engage in politics. In doing so, it responds to calls for greater scholarly investigation into the subjective dimension of experiences and perceptions related to organizational politics (Ferris, Frink, Galang, Zhou, Kacmar and Howard, 1996; Buchanan, 2002; Buchanan, 2008).

5.3.3 Dimensions of political will

By exploring managers' views and experiences about organizational politics and political engagement, the current study identified three attitudinal dimensions as central to managers' willingness to engage in politics: functional, ethical and emotional. In virtue of the qualitative exploratory approach employed, my study surfaced the core concerns guiding managers' involvement in politics: *Is it useful? Is it ethical? How do I feel about it?* In contrast to other studies in the field, I did not rely on pre-established, theoretically-derived dispositional proxies of political will, but sought to capture what drove and shaped managers' political involvement from their own perspective, through the lens of attitudes. Participants' position along these dimensions can be characterized according to valence (positive-negative), intensity (strong-weak) and complexity.

The proposed dimensionality of political will echoes nevertheless prior work in the field, particularly early studies concerned with managerial perceptions of politics (reviewed in section 2.2.2 of this thesis). Typically, these studies were conducted by soliciting managers' generic perceptions and beliefs related to politics as an organizational phenomenon, yet neglecting how managers construe their own engagement in politics. In addition to yielding mixed results, these studies have generally neglected the role of gender. The three dimensions of political will identified in this thesis enable a better understanding of what drives political engagement among managers. In addition, I also identified a number of gender differences in the experiences pertaining to these

dimensions, to a large extent context-dependent. Further on, I discuss these dimensions, along with the relevant gender patterns.

The **functional dimension** of political will emerged when participants commented on the benefits and downsides of political engagement. Confirming previous studies (Buchanan, 2008; Buchanan, 1999; Madison et al., 1980), findings indicated that managers perceived politics as both a threat and an opportunity in achieving individual and organizational objectives. Participants viewed politics as particularly important in managerial roles, which were seen to require a shift of focus from task execution and technical competence to people and process. In other words, there was recognition among participants that managerial performance is ultimately dependent on others. Politics were often seen as a way of getting things done - 'organizational oil' as one participant put it - enabling managers to navigate processes swiftly, to manage competing internal and external demands, to ensuring resources, to establish lucrative coalitions and to influence key decision-makers. This resonates with prior studies which have highlighted the usefulness of politics in managerial roles (Dill and Pearson, 1984; Hartley et al., 2007).

A majority of managers were also acutely aware that the ability to grasp and engage in politics was instrumental for career progression, confirming extant studies (Liu et al., 2010). They particularly commented on the importance of impression management, thus confirming that political behaviours have the potential of enhancing personal reputation (Hochwarter et al., 2007). While all managers were mindful of these generic functional considerations, female managers in Semcom also perceived organizational politics as a way to navigate a masculine organizational culture. Section 5.4 of this chapter will provide more detailed commentary in this respect. What this indicates however is that for these female managers, the perceived functionality of politics was closely related to the experience of being a woman. In contrast to these functional outcomes, many participants also commented on the dysfunctional and disruptive nature of politics, suggesting that it may delay decision-making, foster conflict and frustration, as well as damage careers and reputations.

These aspects were particularly underscored by female managers in Semcom. Overall, these findings suggest that the instrumentality of organizational politics is a central concern shaping managers' willingness to engage in politics. However, in managers' view, politics hold the potential of being both functional and dysfunctional.

The analysis of the interviews indicated that political will also entails an **ethical dimension**. As suggested by the literature review, and by lay definitions of the term, the topic of organizational politics remains fraught with ethical controversy. Gandz and Murray (1980) found that although MBA graduates recognized that politics are inevitable and even instrumental for executive success, they 'did not feel that this is the way it *ought* to be' (p. 245, original emphasis). The authors did not explore in more depth the normative beliefs underpinning these judgements. Zahra (1985) suggested that female managers and older staff perceive politics to be more ethically problematic. However, the scale items employed in his study assessed the perceived ethicality of organizational politics, without defining politics or seeking to specify what exactly female managers found unethical about politics and why. Other scholars have addressed ethical issues pertaining to politics by putting forward normative theoretical models of political behaviour (Cavanagh et al., 1981; Gotsis and Kortezi, 2009). This leaves us ill informed about the ethical judgements employed by managers themselves in assessing the complexities of political engagement. The current study goes some way in surfacing these ethical considerations, from managers' perspective.

While Buchanan (2008) found in his survey that managers did not see ethical impediments to employing politics, the managers interviewed in this study appeared mindful of the ethical dilemmas posed by political engagement. Ethical issues were framed by participants by using terms such as 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' or 'bad', or 'fair' and 'unfair'. While for a few more junior managers politics were deemed illegitimate in virtue of their covert nature, for a majority of managers the ethicality of political engagement hinged upon the nature of the purpose pursued. Managers generally found objectionable political

engagement driven exclusively by self-interest, and described as justified or acceptable political action that enabled the achievement of business objectives. Some of the most conflicted accounts came from female participants who saw politics mainly as the excessive pursuit of self-interest. Echoing Buchanan's findings (2008), female managers in Semcom also appeared more concerned about the victimizing nature of politics. In Bevcorp, a few female managers observed that in general, women 'will draw the line' sooner than men when engaging in politics. Many participants made contextual judgements about the 'wrong' and the 'right' of political action. This perspective emerged especially among those managers who saw politics as the process of reconciling multiple interests, referred to as 'win-win' approaches by Semcom's managers and as 'alignment of agendas' by Bevcorp's managers.

With regards to this second dimension of political will, the added-value of the current study lies not only in identifying managers' ethical considerations about political engagement, but also in surfacing these issues in a non-judgemental manner. Provis (2006) criticized scholarly approaches to organizational politics for suggesting that politics are inherently unethical. Indeed, the literature review revealed that academic definitions of organizational politics differ in the extent to which they convey politics as a fact of life or label politics as illegitimate. Politics have been defined as 'covert, crafty, behind the scenes' (Cropanzano, Kacmar and Bozeman, 1995), opposed to the 'well-being of others' (Kacmar and Baron, 1999), 'ruthless' (Buchanan, 2008) and 'illegitimate' (Mintzberg, 1983). Provis (2006, p. 96) argued:

'If organizational politics is by definition illegitimate, then by definition there is no scope in discussions of organizational politics for considering ethical question about when dissent from formal authority may be morally right or proper.'

Concurring with this view, in the current study I endeavoured to adopt an ethically neutral stance when investigating managers' attitudes toward politics. In effect, the project brief and the interview questions made no explicit reference to the ethical aspects of politics. Furthermore, I did not impose any negative

definition of the term upon participants, guided by the assumption that definitions of politics with clear negative overtones might in fact distort or obscure the ethical dilemmas posed by politics from managers' perspective. Given the exploratory and neutral framing of study, the fact that ethical concerns surfaced is particularly telling. Perhaps more important than the actual rationale that led managers to consider politics as acceptable or reprehensible is their evident need to weigh the ethical implications of political engagement. While there is no way of knowing what type of political behaviours the managers interviewed actually engaged in, the accounts suggested a spread concern regarding the integrity of their political actions. This testifies to the importance of the 'carrying' dimension in the political skill model proposed by Baddely and James (1987) from the perspective of political actors. Werhane (1999) said that managerial decision-making often requires 'moral imagination'. This is acutely pertinent with regards to organizational politics, given their unprescribed and covert nature. My findings thus call attention to the importance of unearthing the moral reasoning behind managerial political engagement.

The third component of political will is the **emotional dimension**. A range of emotional experiences were evoked by participants in relation to politics, using descriptors such as: 'makes me cringe', 'unsettled', 'annoyed', 'exasperated', 'I get really mad and defensive', 'anxiety', 'tension', 'quite comfortable', 'I find it interesting', 'funny, exciting'. What is striking about these emotions is not only their spread in terms of valence – raging from positive to negative – but also their intensity. Conveying intensity and polarization, one female participant from Semcom said about politics: 'It's like marmite. You either hate it or love it.'

While there were very few participants who either 'loved it or hated it', a majority of managers described their experience with politics as both frustrating and rewarding. Among the most common causes of frustration with politics participants mentioned the difficulties of reading 'the behind the scenes', the victimizing effect of politics on themselves and others, the sense of being caught in somebody else's political game and the high stakes of politically-charged decisions. Several managers appeared at ease with politics,

commenting that they found interesting deciphering the political complexities of a given situation. They also said that they were comfortable engaging in politics when necessary, noting however that they became increasingly comfortable engaging in politics with time and experience. More comment about these evolving views will be provided in section 5.5.3 of this chapter. Some noteworthy gender differences emerged with regards to the emotional dimension of political will, whereby some of the most negative emotional experiences related to politics were discussed by female managers, particularly by those in Semcom. Echoing prior commentary in the field (MacKinzie-Davey, 2008; Mann, 1995), the findings suggested that a number of female managers in Semcom found political engagement to be emotionally draining because political behaviours were seen as consistent with masculine norms. In their view, politics was therefore a masculine enterprise, 'a man's thing'. These findings shed additional light into what underpins women's discomfort with politics (Arroba and James, 1988).

The array of negative emotional experiences shared by managers is apparently at odds with Buchanan's (2008) observation that political behaviour is not a source of discomfort for managers. A closer scrutiny into his study indicates that the survey items employed captured managers' views about potential like or dislike of politics among managers in general (e.g. 'Some managers play politics for fun', 'Most managers dislike playing politics'), and not about their individual subjective experiences. The accounts of participants to my study suggest that agreement with such statements may not be indicative in any way of how they experience politics themselves. Indeed, some female managers in Semcom agreed with the fact that politics were an enjoyable game for others, but this certainly did not describe own experience with politics. The same pattern holds true for junior managers in both companies, who were aware that politics were common place for managers at more senior levels, but often felt ill-equipped to deal with it and were therefore frustrated. This underscores once again the importance of focusing on managers' personal, subjective experiences and views when ascertaining their willingness to engage in politics.

Some scholars have in fact suggested that political situations may lead to stress. James and Arriba (1990) proposed that political situations can become a source of stress due to the fact that, by their very nature, politics entail differences in interests, agendas and values, as well as power dynamics. Individuals' emotional reactions to specific situations are dependent upon the extent to which they have a personal stake (Lazarus, 1991). By their nature, politics entail gains, losses or compromises. In addition, the centrality of politics in managerial roles raises the stakes of political engagement for managers and makes emotion an integral part of their experience with politics.

More recent studies of organizational politics have used the POPS model to examine emotional reactions triggered by perceptions of politics, highlighting a range of negative emotional outcomes as a result of politics perceptions (stress, anxiety), which in turn lead to a number of attitudinal and behavioural consequences (cynicism, low commitment, decreased job satisfaction, burnout) (Vigoda, 2002; Liu, Ferris, Treadway, Prati, Perrewé and Hochwarter, 2006; Rosen, Harris and Kacmar, 2009). However, the usefulness of these results in understanding managers' emotional experiences with politics is limited due to the pejorative definition of politics employed in these studies and the POPS model. As discussed in section 2.3.2.2 of the literature review, once politics are defined as 'cliques', 'favouritism' and ruthless behaviour, it is hardly surprising that the emotional reactions and behavioural outcomes of perceiving politics are negative. However, my findings (section 4.2), corroborated with other studies (Hartley et al., 2007; Buchanan, 2008) demonstrate that managers do not define organizational politics exclusively in negative terms. Therefore, the contribution of the current study consists in exploring the emotional dimension of political engagement by focusing on how managers themselves define and experience organizational politics.

The findings also pointed out the **intersectionality of the three dimensions of political will**. For instance, ethical reasoning around politics was partially informed by functional beliefs. In other words, many managers thought that it was acceptable to engage in politics because this enabled them to achieve

business outcomes. However, managers also ascertained the ethical implications of political engagement by considering not only *what* was being achieved through political action, but also *how* political engagement enabled them to achieve specific outcomes. When political gains were achieved at the expense of others, managers commented not only on a perceived violation of principles of fairness, but also on the negative emotional experience associated with these ethical tensions. Incongruence among dimensions typically concerned the functional and emotional aspects and meant that some managers – usually female - acknowledged the functional benefits of political engagement, yet were not comfortable or ready to ‘play the game’. This suggests that the emotional dimension may sometimes trump the functional one in shaping managers’ willingness to engage in politics, contradicting the notion that managers are invariably prepared to engage in politics ‘when necessity commands’ (Buchanan and Badham, 2007). This incongruence can be understood as attitudinal ambivalence, and reflects the complex and controversial nature of politics as an organizational phenomenon. Section 5.3.3 will elucidate how participants resolved these ambivalences, highlighting the role the organizational context in how political will unfolds developmentally.

5.3.4 Summary

In conclusion, a primary contribution of this study contributes to the literature on organizational politics consists in conceptually refining and empirically substantiating the concept of political will. Endeavouring to overcome the limitations of dispositional approaches in understanding what drives managers to engage in politics, I proposed that managers’ willingness to engage in politics can be better grasped by examining their specific attitudes toward organizational politics and toward personally engaging in politics. What my study demonstrated is that managers do hold a range of explicit attitudes pertaining to involvement in politics, which speak more closely to their propensity to act politically than generic dispositional measures. Among the variety of attitudes expressed, three overarching themes emerged, conveying the core considerations shaping managers’ involvement in politics: *Is it useful?*

Is it ethical? How do I feel about it? Consequently, a theoretical contribution of this study is to map out the dimensionality of political will along these lines: functional, ethical and emotional.

While prior studies offered some evidence about the ways in which managers view politics as useful or harmful, the current study demonstrated that, along with these functional concerns, managers' willingness to engage in politics depends upon a number of ethical judgements, as well as the emotional experience associated with politics. In doing so, it contributes to a stream of research on ethics and politics, which has been predominantly normative and theoretical. In addition, the findings place emotion squarely at the centre of managers' experience with politics. The study also provides insight into the interconnectedness of the three dimensions of political will. In addition, the study brought evidence that the attitudes underpinning these three dimensions are dynamic and subject to development. Section 5.3.3 will discuss this in further detail. In summary, this study thus offers an understanding of political will which is non-generic – in that it takes into account managers' specific attitudes toward politics -, dynamic, and context-sensitive.

5.4 Refining the concept of political skill

This study also makes a secondary contribution to the organizational politics field by further exploring the concept of political skill. While prior investigations into the concept of political will could be described as a nascent stream of research (Edmonson and McManus, 2007), the concept of political skill was a more mature one, having frequently been the object of prior scholarly work. The study aimed to ascertain what represents skilled political engagement from the perspective of managers interviewed. Following the analysis of the interviews, five dimensions emerged as critical to political skill (as presented in section 4.5 of the thesis). These findings share a number of elements found in other political skill models and will be discussed in relation to these.

5.4.1 Dimensions of political skill

Awareness, the foundational dimension of political skill, was described by participants as the capacity to understand and diagnose the political landscape, which entails elements such as identifying individual and group motives and conflicting agendas, reading the informal power web, and mapping out key stakeholders. Virtually all models of political skill reviewed in the literature refer to this dimension in some shape or form. James and Baddeley (1987) propose 'reading' as one of the two key dimensions defining skilled political behaviour. Ferris et al. (2000; 2007) put forward 'social astuteness' as one of the four dimensions of their Political Skill Inventory. Hartley et al. (2007) refer to 'reading people and situations' as one of the five facets of political skill, which in their view builds on personal and interpersonal skills in grasping the complexities of the political landscape. While this dimension is analytical in its nature and essentially concerned with how well individuals grasp or diagnose the political landscape, the remaining dimensions refer to how well individuals actively operate within this landscape and could thus be described as political engagement skills.

The second dimension of political skill, **developing networks and relationships**, emerged as participants discussed the criticality of others in getting things done. The ability to deliberately build social networks and strong interpersonal relationships was described as instrumental in achieving business objectives and navigating organizational processes. This echoes a relational view of power and reinforces Pfeffer's observation that 'having connections, having allies, is important for developing and exercising influence' (1992, p. 175). Some differences related to organizational context emerged in the way managers referred to this dimension. While managers in Bevcorp employed recurrently the term 'relationships', managers in Semcom acknowledged relational interdependencies, yet they referred to them by using terms like 'networks', 'links', or 'succeeding through others'.

Hartley et al. (2007) allude to these skills in depicting the role of interpersonal skills in their political skill framework. In addition, Ferris et al. (2005) posit that networking ability is a critical dimension of political skill because 'people in these networks tend to hold assets seen as valuable and necessary for successful personal and organizational functioning' (p. 129). My study confirms indeed that managers view strong relationships and networks as a way of accessing resources and navigating the political landscape. However, what my findings also reveal is that female managers, more often than their male counterparts, are less prepared to engage in the sort of activities required to develop these networks and relationships. For example, female managers in both companies discussed their reluctance to proactively network without an obvious work-related rationale, to deliver presentations or engage with more senior stakeholders for the sole purpose of raising their visibility. This confirms prior studies which have highlighted gender differences in the way individuals develop and use networks (Burt, 1998; Ibarra, 1997) and in their readiness to engage in impression management in the workplace (Singh, Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2002; Guadagno and Cialdini, 2007).

Finally, highlighting the interdependencies between multiple dimensions of political skill, the findings in my study indicated that the significance of networks and relationships was ascertained by individuals by drawing on the awareness skills described above. In addition, networks and relationships were leveraged on as managers endeavoured to create alignment.

Creating alignment emerged as facet of political skill particularly important in managerial roles and in the matrix-structured organizations in which participants operated. This dimension essentially entails a recognition of competing agendas and the ability to find common ground in the plurality of interests at stake. In order to achieve this, participants leveraged on existing networks and relationships through alliances, coalitions, sponsorship. Alignment was seen critical to operating in a matrix organization, where participants were required to mitigate competing loyalties and to achieve objectives by relying on people over whom they had no direct authority. Pointing to the importance of this structural

condition in generating political activity, Zanzi and O'Neil (2001) noticed that 'in a typical matrix structure, coordination and balance between product and function is achieved mainly by political means and negotiation' (p. 245). Again, nuances in corporate language were observed, whereby managers in Semcom spoke more frequently about 'getting buy-in from stakeholders', while managers in Bevcorp invariably stressed the importance of 'aligning stakeholders'. Confirming prior work in the field, this dimension overlaps with what Hartley et al. (2007) described as 'building alignment and alliances'.

The fourth identified dimension of political skill was **versatile influence**. That influence lies at the heart of political action is evident from the definition of organizational politics – both the academic one and the one provided by participants. However, participants consistently stressed a style component which defined politically effective influence: versatility. Politically skilled individuals were seen to be able to adjust their influence behaviour to different individuals and situations. This meant not assuming that 'one size fits all', being able to understand what sort of influence attempts would be most successful in a given context or with a given person and being able to deploy a range of persuasion strategies accordingly (i.e. rational/emotional appeal, direct/indirect). In doing so, individuals leveraged on all prior dimensions of political skill. Again, this resonates with prior work in the field. Implied in the political skill framework developed by Baddeley and James (1987) is the notion that skilled political actors adapt their behaviour according to how they read the political landscape. In addition, Ferris et al. (2005; p. 129) commented the following on the importance of flexibility when exerting interpersonal influence:

'Individuals high on interpersonal influence nonetheless are capable of appropriately adapting and calibrating their behavior to each situation in order to elicit particular responses from others.'

Finally, participants also described **authenticity** as an essential ingredient of skilled political action. Authenticity was generally inferred based on the overlap between perceived intentions and displayed behaviours while engaging in politics. In addition, participants also defined authentic political engagement as

relying on directness, openness and congruence with personal values and preferred interpersonal styles. Various terms were used to refer to this. Most managers from Bevcorp referred explicitly to the notion of 'authenticity', while Semcom's managers spoke more about 'transparency' and 'being upfront'. Across the entire sample, several participants stressed the importance of 'doing the right thing' when engaging in politics. When discussing involvement in politics, women in particular placed a premium on 'being true to oneself' and 'being able to look at yourself in the mirror'. These comments resonate strongly with academic definitions of authenticity as 'the degree of congruence between internal values and external expressions' (Morgan Roberts, 2007, p. 329). In its emphasis on honesty, the conception of authenticity expressed by participants evokes to some extent with the notion of integrity of political behaviour, suggested by Baddeley and James (1987). At the same time, it is somewhat consistent with the dimensions proposed by Ferris and collaborators in the Political Skill Inventory. Ferris et al. (2007; p. 232) proposed that 'apparent sincerity' represents the fourth dimension of their political skill model, suggesting that:

'Politically skilled individuals appear to others as having high levels of integrity and as being authentic, sincere, and genuine. They are, or appear to be, honest and forthright.'

What my findings demonstrated is that as political actors themselves, managers were not only concerned with *being perceived* or perceiving others as authentic when engaging in politics, but chiefly with *feeling* authentic and comfortable when doing so. In a sense, this dimension supported the other engagement skills, in that it appeared to provide managers with an inner compass as they reached out to others and attempted to develop relationships and networks, to build alignment or to exert influence with versatility. The findings also suggested that this aspect of political engagement was particularly relevant, and at the same time challenging, for women. As indicated when discussing the previous dimensions of political skill, female managers often perceived or experienced a number of behaviours required for political engagement as 'unnatural'. Section

5.3.3 will provide further discussion about the role of gender in feeling true to oneself when engaging in politics. Whether authentic political engagement is more out of reach for women or not, this last dimension of political skill identified in the study extends and nuances prior models of political skill by demonstrating that, from the perspective of managers as political actors, an important aspect of skilled political engagement lies not only in perceived genuineness, but also in felt authenticity. In effect, the accounts provided by interviewees with regards to this dimension of political skill echoed the definition of authenticity employed in writings of authentic leadership. Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans and May (2004, p. 802) defined authentic leaders as those who ‘know who they are, what they believe and value, and they act upon those values and beliefs while transparently interacting with others.’ My findings suggest that the issue of authenticity deserves attention not only in the context of leadership, but also as related to more discretionary aspects of managerial work such as political engagement.

5.4.2 Summary

In summary, with regards to the dimensionality of political skill, the current study confirmed to a large extent previous models of political skill. At the same time, what is perhaps equally important and telling, is the lack of consistency among the two models of political skill discussed (Ferris et al., 2000, 2007; Hartley et al., 2007) and my findings. Specifically, compared to the Political Skill Inventory proposed by Ferris and collaborators, my study mirrored to some extent the dimensions proposed, but identified ‘building alignment’ as an additional dimension. In comparison to the political skill framework developed by Hartley and collaborators, the findings resonated to some extent with all but the last dimension proposed by the authors, namely ‘strategic direction and scanning’. A plausible explanation for these differences can be related to the managerial level at which these frameworks were developed, either in light of their conceptual aim or the samples employed. In fact, in developing their model, Ferris and collaborators were simply concerned with political skill at work in general, and not particularly with the nature of political skill in managerial roles.

Although a number of studies have demonstrated the positive relationship between political skill (as measured with the PSI) and managerial effectiveness, many studies in this stream examined the role of political skill for employees at all levels. However, the concept and its corresponding questionnaire were not developed to capture what is specific about political skill in managerial roles. In contrast, Hartley and collaborators have developed their framework by using a large sample of very senior managers and were concerned not only with political skill *within* the organization, but also with political skill *outside* and *of* the organization. The fifth dimension of their political skill framework is fundamentally related to this external facet of leadership and political skill. Strategic direction and scanning entails, in the authors' view, an understanding of how power dynamics outside the organization unfold in relation to the strategic purpose of the organization. Hartley et al. (2007, p. 29) specifically comment about this dimension:

‘It requires analytical capacity to think through scenarios of possible futures, to think about small changes which may herald bigger shifts in society and the economy, and being able to find ways to analyse and manage (as far as possible) the uncertainty which lies outside the organisation.’

The current study did not focus on political skill as related to the leadership of the organization, nor did it employ a comparably senior sample of managers; it focused on political engagement within the organization and employed a sample predominantly composed of middle managers. However, what the differences and the overlaps between my findings and these two frameworks suggest is that the nature of political skill is relative to seniority. While the ability to build alignment across individuals and departments is core for middle managers and arguably less important among non-managers, strategic direction and scanning is a political skill called for at very senior managerial levels. This role-dependent perspective of political skill is in synch with more generic models of managerial effectiveness which consider skills in conjuncture with the nature of role demands and organizational environment (Boyatzis,

1982). By situating the findings of the current study within the extant literature on political skill, my study calls attention to the fact that the definition and dimensionality of political skill are closely dependent upon the level of seniority and should be examined as such. From this perspective, the findings of the doctoral study extend the literature on political skill by refining its dimensionality in a way that is pertinent particularly for middle managerial roles. In addition, the findings also add depth of insight into the nature of political skill dimensions employed in the PSI, the most widely used conceptualization of political skill in current micro-approaches in the field. Specifically, the findings brought evidence about the importance of authenticity as an essential ingredient of skilled political action. In addition, the study highlighted how gender obstructs the deployment of certain aspects of political skill.

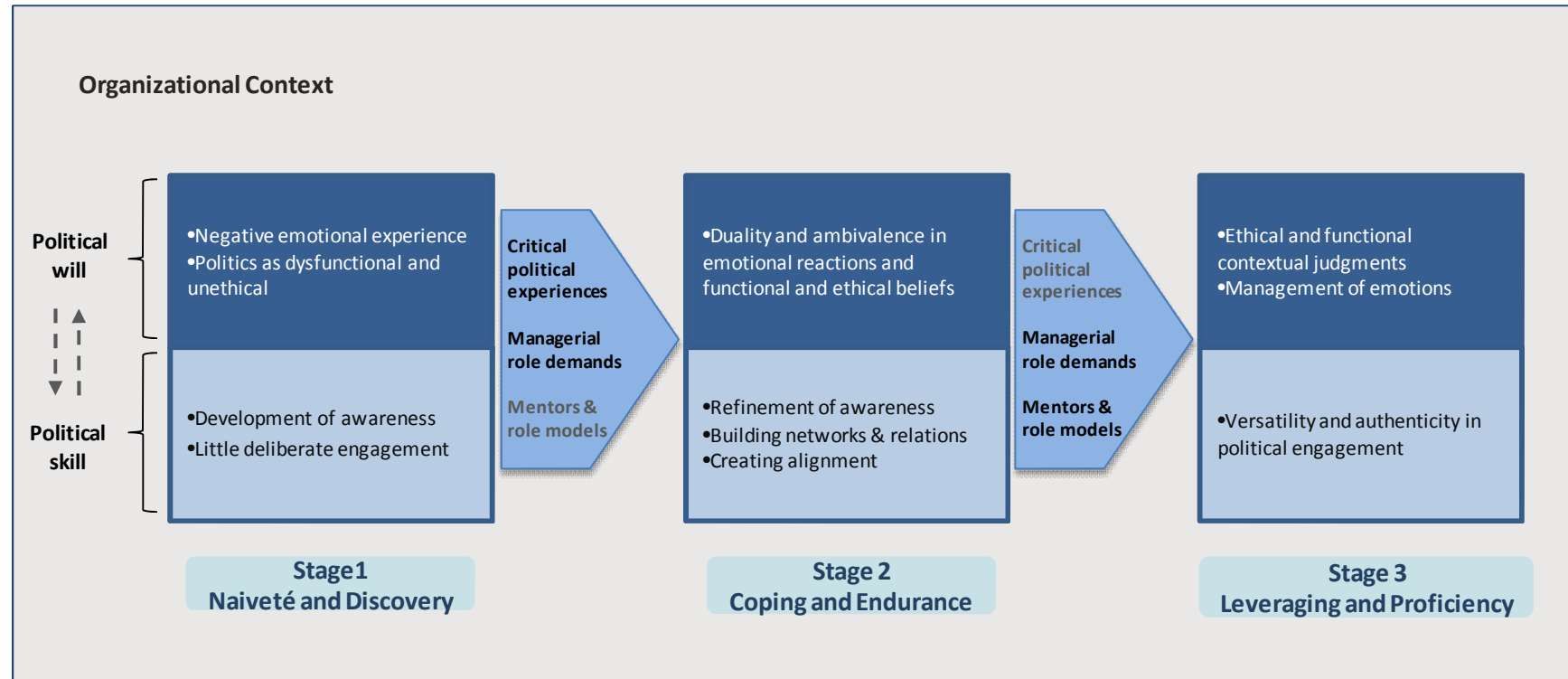
In addition to the refinement pertaining to the dimensionality of political skill, the other contribution of the current study consists in providing a dynamic understanding of managerial political skill by mapping out its gradual development, within the context of a broader political maturation process. In order to avoid redundancy, this contribution will be explained and substantiated in the following section, which explains the theoretical significance of a developmental perspective on both political will and skill.

5.5 Toward a model of political maturation

So far, the contribution of this study has been discussed as related to the conceptualization and dimensionality of political will and skill. In addition, the study also captured developmental changes in both political will and skill, along the dimensions previously identified for each construct. These changes were indicative of a gradual maturation of political will and skill defined by distinguishable, progressive patterns. Section 4.6 of the Findings chapter described these maturation patterns by outlining three stages: Naiveté and Discovery, Coping and Endurance, and Leveraging and Proficiency. The study also identified key triggers that appeared to drive individuals' transition across

stages and thus facilitate political maturation. These were discussed in section 4.7. By integrating these findings, in this section I make a first step toward articulating a tentative model of political maturation. Figure 5-2 below graphically depicts the model by drawing on and by inter-relating the key constructs presented in the Findings. Further on, I discuss the need for a developmental perspective in the field of politics (section 5.5.1). I then provide an overview of the maturation stages and triggers and link these findings to extant literature in the field (section 5.5.2). I conclude by summarizing the contributions of the model to the literature (section 5.5.3).

Figure 5-2 A model of political maturation



Note. The graphical model highlights only the developmental milestones for each stage, along the dimensions of maturation: political will (functional, ethical, emotional) and political skill (awareness, networks and relationships, alignment, versatility, authenticity). Triggers of maturation (critical political experiences, managerial role demands, mentors and role models) are selectively emphasized to signal their relative importance to the transition between stages.

5.5.1 Introducing a developmental perspective on political will and skill

In the Literature review and the Methodology chapters I discussed the fact that up to date, scholarly work examining individual engagement in politics has predominantly adopted a variance approach. Variance approaches typically call for quantitative methods, are outcome-driven and seek explanations of change by examining causation in terms of independent variables acting on dependent ones; their explanatory power depends upon how easily one can apply the models proposed to a range of contexts (Van de Ven, 2007). For instance, the political skill model developed by Ferris and collaborators has been used in an array of large-scale studies, with the purpose of testing the antecedents and consequences (i.e. performance, reputation, career progression) of being politically skilled in the workplace. In contrast, process approaches typically call for qualitative methods, are event-driven and examine change by taking into account temporally evolving phenomena (Langley, 2009); their explanatory power depends upon the versatility of the model proposed or its power to account for developmental patterns. Such a developmental perspective is currently absent from extant literature on organizational politics. For instance, while numerous studies examined the consequences of having or lacking political skill, there has been little attention devoted to better understanding why and how individuals end up being politically skilled. Consequently, while we know what *being* politically skilled entails, we are left with little insight into the process of *becoming* politically skilled. Similarly, in the realm of political will, dispositional approaches have attempted to identify personality traits that predict engagement in politics, thereby focusing on causal relations between willingness to engage in politics and its behavioural effects. This implies however that willingness to engage in politics is a static phenomenon. Therefore, a key question that remains unaddressed by current work in the field of organizational politics is: How do managers become more willing and better able to engage in politics?

The current study makes a first step in addressing this shortcoming in the extant literature. It does so by analyzing data pertaining to political will and skill from a developmental perspective and mapping out patterns of development in both of these areas, as well as identifying triggers of development. As a result, the thesis puts forward the notion of political maturation, arguing that maturation entails growth in both political will and skill. While previous sections of this chapter discussed how the study contributed to the conceptualization and dimensionalization of political will and skill, this section examines the contribution offered by a dynamic understanding of these two concepts.

The notion of political maturation has been previously alluded to by Mainiero (1994), who observed that one of the key seasoning lessons supporting women's executive development was exiting a state of political naïveté and developing awareness of the corporate culture. By this, Mainiero particularly referred to how women discovered the value of being direct and the need to calibrate outspokenness by taking into account the corporate culture. Other seasoning lessons outlined in her study were 'building credibility', 'refining a style' and 'shouldering responsibilities'. These last three stages entail however learning around a range of issues, inconsequential to organizational politics per se (e.g. delegation, team-building, mentoring, work-life balance). Thus, the label of 'political maturation' is arguably unwarranted given that the paper does not really unpack how and why women became skilled at handling politics, but merely suggests that political competence is a pillar of executive development. It must also be stressed that Mainiero's work does not draw on extant research in the field of organizational politics per se. In relation to this study, my doctoral work elucidates *what* political maturation entails and *how* the process of political maturation unfolds, by drawing on the concepts of political skill and will, deeply anchored in the organizational politics literature.

Furthermore, a few other authors discussed the idea of development related to navigating organizational politics (Hartley et al., 2007; Hartley, 2009; Ferris et al., 2002). Ferris et al. (2002) suggest that political skill 'is a competency that can be substantially shaped or developed' (p. 4) and propose that executive

coaching is best most suited approach to support managers in becoming more aware of their political environments and more able to navigate them. Other methods suggested include assessment and feedback using psychometrics, role-playing and developmental simulations, leadership training, and mentoring. Interestingly, some of these recommended methods were described to be least valuable in terms of political skill development within the large sample of UK managers used by Hartley et al. (2007). Their survey found that most managers considered learning from psychometrics relatively unhelpful in terms of political development; instead, they generally learned to handle politics by drawing on personal experience and observation. These sources testify indeed to the importance of development in the realm of politics, and endeavour to ascertain what methods are best suited to develop political competency. However, this very limited literature provides no insight into how development unfolds. The current study addresses this shortcoming in the literature, by providing an indication of how political maturation unfolds. Additionally, prior literature makes an implicit assumption that development in the political realm entails only development of political skill. The current study challenges this assumption by demonstrating that maturation entails growth in both political will and skill. In the subsequent section, I discuss the specific results underpinning these claims.

5.5.2 Overview of developmental patterns: stages and triggers of political maturation

Having established the need for a developmental perspective in the field of politics in the section above, this section provides an integrated discussion of the findings pertaining to political maturation stages and triggers, linking them to extant literature on organizational politics. Given the novelty of such a perspective, there is scarce literature in the field that can shed insight into the stage-like transitions corresponding to the maturation of political will and skill. Therefore, despite attempting to establish the theoretical meaning of the findings in the context of current research in the field, these remain rather emergent and tentative.

Stage one: Naiveté and Discovery

For a majority of participants, the maturation journey began with a range of entrenched assumptions about the prevalence of meritocracy and rationality of organizational life. Examples of such assumptions, qualified as 'naive' in retrospect, were the belief that power is synonymous with authority or the expectation that expertise, knowledge or sheer competency will persuade others and lead to recognition and success. The notion of political naiveté was also discussed by Mainiero (1994), who considered it an integral part of executive development. This state of 'blissful ignorance', as depicted by one participant, bears a striking resemblance to what Baddeley and James (1987) described as innocent political behaviour. The politically innocent individual, the authors claim, 'is confident that his or her authority derives from being right about information and procedure, and from sticking to the 'understood' codes of morality' (p. 15). Kakabadse and Parker's (1984) suggested that innocent behaviour is 'default reasoning' about politics. My findings support this observation and provide a more nuanced understanding of what exactly political 'naiveté' entails. The accounts specifically indicate that individuals tend to set out in their careers enamoured with the Weberian ideals of technocracy, meritocracy, and rationality. As such, the questioning of these implicit expectations represents a foundational gain in political awareness, defining for this stage. This is also the first indication that learning is an integral part of political maturation.

For the most part, the transition from naiveté to a basic political awareness occurred as participants witnessed or experienced work-related events that gradually dismantled their assumptions and enabled them to grasp the unwritten rules of the workplace. Thus, **critical political experiences** appeared to be the most powerful trigger of political maturation at this stage. For example, a typical political incident described as eye-opening was failure to get endorsement for proposed ideas during meetings, due to lack of influencing key stakeholders beforehand. While both male and female managers described these critical experiences as 'painful', what the analysis revealed was that for a

majority of female managers - particularly in Secom – these incidents were gendered. By ‘gendered’ I mean that they were related to patterns of behaviour and interaction stemming from and perpetuating structural gender inequalities in the workplace (Acker, 1990; New, 2004). Such examples were women’s reluctance to use impression management and failure to gain visibility and rewards compared to male counterparts, or exclusion from informal networks organized around male activities such as golf. In addition, as participants started taking on managerial responsibilities, they became more and more cognizant of the fact that effectiveness requires more than task focus. They started shifting from being ‘executionally focused’ - as one participant put it - to being attuned to process and interdependencies. The role of critical political experiences as triggers of maturation confirms and extends prior work in the field of politics. Specifically, in a large-scale survey, Hartley et al. (2007) found that learning from one’s own mistakes is the most important factor leading to the development of political skills. Similarly, my findings signal the importance of learning through personal experience. In addition, my findings provide a richer, qualitative understanding into what kind of experience or ‘mistakes’ are most impactful in terms of learning about politics at this early stage of the maturation journey (for example, failure to self-promote for career promotion or failure to get buy-in from key stakeholders for specific projects/initiatives). Therefore, the current study not only exemplifies typical political mistakes and experiences, but also testifies to the criticality of such experiences from a developmental perspective, suggesting that they are foundational to the maturation journey.

As individuals’ awareness of the political dimension of the workplace sharpened, attitudes toward organizational politics began to crystallize, signalling the emergence of political will. In other words, confronted with a newly discovered political reality of their workplaces, individuals inevitably started developing attitudes toward that reality. This lends credence to the conceptualization of political will proposed in this thesis. Unlike dispositional personality factors, attitudes emerge from and are shaped by experience (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). At an emotional level, early experiences with politics caused feelings of shock, confusion, and frustration. Additionally, given that

awakening political experiences typically entailed a violation of individuals' expectations of how organizational processes 'should' operate, politics were broadly perceived as dysfunctional and illegitimate (the functional and ethical dimensions of political will). These findings confirm and extend prior studies examining evaluative perceptions of politics (discussed in section 2.3.2.1 of the Literature Review chapter). Specifically, Gantz and Murray (1980) found that while MBA students recognized that politics are prevalent at top managerial levels and even instrumental for executive success, they also saw politics as dysfunctional and 'did not feel that this is the way it *ought* to be' (p. 245, original emphasis). The current study suggests that such views may be temporary stances in a broader process of political maturation. Indeed, other studies found that among more senior samples, political activity was deemed both necessary and acceptable (Madison et al., 1980; Buchanan, 2008). These prior studies using samples of varying seniority, suggest that the more senior one becomes, the more acceptable politics are perceived to be. However, the findings of the current study lend empirical support to such an assertion, by specifically tracking how willingness to engage in politics does develop with seniority. In addition, the study extends this assertion by demonstrating that increased willingness to engage in politics and ability to do so evolve interdependently, crystallizing into broader maturation patterns which are seniority-dependent. Table 4-6, in the Findings chapter, revealed interesting patterns within the study sample. Specifically, out of six junior managers, four were currently in Stage 1, two were in Stage 2 and none was in Stage 3. Out of 18 middle managers, one was transitioning from Stage 1 to Stage 2, six were in Stage 2, four appeared to be transitioning between Stage 2 and Stage 3, and seven were in Stage 3. Finally, out of fourteen senior managers, thirteen were in Stage 3 and only one was transitioning between Stage 1 and 2. These patterns demonstrate the link between seniority and political maturation, which comprises both will and skill.

Because individuals mostly perceived politics as illegitimate and disruptive in Stage 1, they were not necessarily willing to engage in it, nor too concerned with developing political engagement skills. So in terms of actual engagement, while individuals started to recognize the possibility or opportunity to resort to

political influence through relationships, networks or versatile influence, there was little attempt, if any, to employ these political engagement skills. In effect, individuals seemed most concerned with avoiding or containing politics. While in section 4.6 I described this approach as 'passive', it must be stressed that it was passive or non-deliberate from the perspective of individuals at this stage of their journey. Obviously, the implicit assumption was that one can somehow opt out of politics. With hindsight however, many participants spoke about being 'a pawn', therefore being caught in other people's political games rather than being immune to them.

Stage two: Coping and Endurance

The second stage is perhaps the most intense one in terms of qualitative changes along the various dimensions of both political will and skill, entailing a diversification and polarization of attitudes and behaviours related to politics. In virtue of their roles, participants shifted from seeing politics as accidental events outside 'the work itself', to seeing politics as an enduring aspect of their work. Consequently, they became gradually aware that having a grasp of politics is necessary and important.

Managerial experience emerged as the key trigger throughout this stage. Prior studies on the development of political skill found that managers listed experience on the job, handling crises and working with other organizations as common methods of developing political skill (Hartley et al., 2007; Hartley, 2009). While these are generic dimensions of managerial work, my study surfaces politically-charged areas of managerial experience, thereby bringing additional insight into what aspects of managerial work are relevant for political maturation. Additionally, the current findings confirm prior studies which indicated that political activities such as managing conflicts, aligning agendas and influencing are integral aspects of managerial roles (Porter et al., 1981; Buchanan, 2008). However, the findings also show how such activities act as triggers for further development of political will and skill.

Whereas in this stage, individuals remained alert to the dysfunctional sides of politics, they also started to appreciate the functional benefits of political engagement. There was evidence of dualism and ambivalence along the three dimensions of political will, which meant that politics were perceived as simultaneously functional and/or dysfunctional, right and/or wrong, and pleasant and/or stressful. The frequent description of politics as 'a necessary evil' signalled incongruence among the dimensions of political will: on one side, a realization that politics can be useful, on the other hand a belief that politics are reprehensible. Given this ambivalence, it is worth considering how political will impacts concrete political behaviours. Ambivalent attitudes were found to be less stable over time and therefore less predictive of behaviours; they were also found to be more malleable in the face of persuasion (Armitage and Conner, 2000). When it comes to making behavioural choices, individuals holding ambivalent attitudes 'sit on the fence', because their behaviour could be driven by any opposing belief or emotion. Contextual cues thus become critical in shaping behaviours underpinned by ambivalent attitudes.

Taking note of these ambivalences, in the present study I endeavoured to shed some light into how and why organizational context plays a role in shaping managers' political will. A notable gender pattern emerged, whereby some female managers from Semcom expressed the most polarized negative attitudes with regards to politics⁹. As explained in section 5.3.1.3, a few women expressed vivid discomfort, frustration and turmoil as a result of experiencing politics. The fact that their reactions were more intensely negative compared to their male counterparts, as well as compared to female managers in Bevcorp, can plausibly be explained by the nature of the political experiences they were exposed to. Specifically, it can be argued that repeated exposure to gendered political incidents confronted these women with exclusionary informal structures of power (Kanter, 1977; Mainiero, 1986), making them well aware of engrained obstacles they were confronted to. Awareness of injustice engenders distress

⁹ The fact that the most extreme negative accounts came from women does not necessarily mean that this was the representative attitudinal stance for the group of female managers in Semcom overall.

and frustration (Goodman, 2011). Examining the role of emotion in the workplace, affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) tells us that individuals experience a range of emotions in response to daily hassles and uplifts in the workplace. These 'affective events' impact not only the short-term reactions, but also have long-term effects on attitudinal and behavioural responses, in virtue of their cumulative effect. As such, for these female managers the distress associated with politics stemmed not only from the sheer intricacies of organizational politics, but also from the acute awareness of gender inequalities engrained in the masculine political landscape common in Semcom. The interdependency between political will and skill was evident, in that those women who had most negative perceptions of politics were also more adamant in their refusal to engage in it in any shape or form. Therefore, the current study goes some way in explaining and providing evidence as to why, in some contexts, women may be reluctant to engage in politics. In doing so, it brings evidence from a gender-mixed sample and contributes to a small stream of papers (Arroba and James, 1988; Mainiero, 1994; Mann, 1995; Perrewe and Nelson, 2004; MacKinzie Davey, 2008) which have either been entirely theoretical or have employed female-only samples. A distinctive added-value of this study is that it accounts for organizational context in tackling the role of gender in managers' experiences with politics, by highlighting how organizational norms and culture within two companies impact differently women's political experiences. It must be stressed however, that although not paved with gender obstacles, coming to terms with politics was retrospectively described as 'painful' by several male participants as well.

With regards to political skill, in this stage, a refinement in political awareness meant that managers progressed from a generic, raw view of politics to a more sophisticated grasp of motives and competing agendas in the workplace. The above mentioned dualism in political will meant that individuals often attempted to parcel out the 'good' and the 'bad' in politics when tentatively defining the boundaries of their own involvement in politics. What stood out in this stage was a struggle, on the part of participants, to identify a moral compass in reflecting on and experimenting with politics. These changes in ethical reasoning around

politics confirm the need to unearth the moral reasoning behind managerial political engagement and provide a glimpse into it, thus addressing a shortcoming of extant research in the field, which suggests that politics are inherently unethical (Provis, 2006).

In this stage, there was practice and development at the level of political engagement skills, particularly in building networks and relationships and creating alignment. However, resistance to flexing one's approach to influence was quite common, indicating little versatility. Underpinning that was a sense that engagement in politics required individuals to behave in ways that were not congruent with one's values or personal style. Therefore, lack of versatility was to some extent deliberate. This suggests that various dimensions of political skill identified by prior models in the field (e.g. Ferris et al.; Hartely et al.) and confirmed by the current study may develop at a different pace, thus extending our current understanding of political skill.

In transitioning between this stage and the next one, **mentors and role models** become increasingly important. Participants discussed that mentors, whether formal or informal, allowed them to share and reflect on personal experiences and perceptions related to politics. The conversations had a double value for individuals struggling to find their way through the political landscape: (a) direct advice, and sharing of political experience from mentor to protégé and (b) 'holding the mirror up', helping managers to become more self-aware by acting like a sounding board and by providing specific feedback about how individuals dealt with politics. This feedback sometimes made participants aware of increases in their own political skill. A few participants spoke about coaches fulfilling a similar role. In addition, role modelling occurred as participants observed others engaging skilfully in politics and attempted to reproduce their behaviour or style. These findings resonate with the extant limited literature on how to develop political skill. Hartley et al. (2007) found that among 24 methods used to develop political skill, managers rated in the top 10 the following: observing role models, having time to reflect, professional coaching, and informal mentoring. My findings suggest that informal mentoring and role

modelling are the two most important avenues of relational learning in the maturation journey, and that coaching plays a secondary role. In a theoretical chapter, Ferris et al. (2002) unpacked in more detail the role of mentors in developing individuals' political skill:

‘effective mentors not only model effective influence behaviors so that protégés learn by observation, but also take time to discuss various social interactions so that proteges can more fully understand how and why mentors acted in such a manner’ (p. 21).

The current study offers empirical support to this assertion and underscores the importance of learning through others with regards to politics. Mentors and role models had a critical role in supporting the transition from Stage 2 to Stage 3, by helping individuals make sense of their political experiences and by providing them with alternative ways of thinking about politics or engaging in it, thus shaping both political will and skill.

Stage three: Leveraging and Proficiency

This stage corresponded to a transition from a conflicted and polarized take on politics toward a certain appeasement and a sense of proficiency in dealing with political situations. To begin with, managers entirely relinquished the idea of opting out of politics. In fact, some participants have stressed the importance of being in the middle of it. As one participant put it, ‘the power is in being in the conversation, not shying away from it.’ Perhaps this insight reflects a wise understanding of what Pericles once declared: ‘Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you!’

To a large extent, managers appeared to have transcended the dualisms and ambivalences of the prior stage. While there was still a clear recognition of both functional and dysfunctional, as well as legitimate and illegitimate aspects of political engagement, there was an increased expression of a more neutral, relativistic view of politics, and the ability to make contextual judgements about the nature of political engagement. For instance, participants compared politics

to 'energy or money – it depends where you put it' or to 'oxygen; something that exists but isn't necessarily good or bad'. This does not signify however a lack of concern about the ethically sensitive aspects of politics. In effect, managers derived an increased sense of authenticity when engaging in politics partially based on the fact that they had identified ways of engaging in politics that were congruent with their values. In this respect, there are both similarities and points of contrast between my findings and the political skill model proposed by Baddeley and James (1988). The similarity consists in a relative overlap of this last stage of political maturation with the notion of 'wise' political behaviour, which entails a mix of skill and integrity in dealing with politics. However, understandings of what represents principled politics vary according to individual and organizational factors. Women for example appeared more concerned about the victimizing effect of politics on others, compared to men. Therefore, my model is not trying to advance a normative understanding of what 'principled politics' represents. The model does not suggest that at the end point of the maturation journey, managers identify or employ a strict template of ethical political behaviour as; it rather stresses that, in maturing politically, managers ponder over the moral implications of politics and seek to define their own ethical boundaries.

A key developmental milestone mentioned by participants was the ability to manage their immediate emotional reactions when faced with political situations. Occasionally, in face-to-face meetings, this involved masking emotions in order to avoid appearing unsettled – a strategic display of emotion associated with social influence (Wharton and Erickson, 1993). More frequently, participants spoke about not getting caught in replying immediately to unsettling emails with a political significance and simply taking a break until the immediate reaction cooled off. This strategy is indicative of emotional self-regulation (Clark, 1990) in dealing with politics. Therefore, with regards to the emotional dimension of political will, participants displayed a pragmatic acceptance of politics which enabled them to better manage their emotions when confronted or engaged in politics. This conveyed a general sense of appeasement and composure, after the turmoil of the previous stage.

Refinement along the dimensions of political skill was conveyed by several qualitative changes. First, awareness was understood not only as ability to diagnose agendas at stake in a given situation, but as perspective-taking and deeper connection with the other person's views, needs, and motives. There was not only awareness, but also ability to engage in informal influence processes by building relationships and networks sometimes went beyond a transactional approach, particularly for participants in Bevcorp. Participants increasingly saw creating alignment as an integral part of their job. This confirms and nuances prior findings in the field: Zahra (1985) found that younger employees and junior and middle managers considered politics important mostly for career promotion, while senior managers felt that their roles compelled them to engage in politics. Indeed, while in discussing Stage 2, I referred to the fact that individuals begun acknowledging the value of politics for career progression purposes, and using it in various extents to this effect. The qualitative change distinguishing Stage 2 from Stage 3 is that managing politics was now seen as a more integral part of the job, rather than something one needs to attend to occasionally. In contrast to the prior stages, where politics was perceived as somewhat divorced from 'the real work', at this stage politics were seen as an embedded in it. In effect, when asked about how important politics are in his job, one senior manager replied: 'This *is* my job'. These findings add richness to Zahra's assertion, showing how managers progress between these different stances on politics. While Zahra discussed the difference between junior and senior managers, my study offers a more granular understanding of the transition between seeing politics as distractions for 'real work' one must avoid (start point - Stage 1), to seeing them as recurrent aspects of the work one must cope with (mid-point - Stage 2), to seeing them as integral aspects of work one must leverage (end point - Stage 3).

Skill wise, there was a progression towards proficiency and expertise. Indeed, several managers commented on 'trusting their instincts' more or 'having better instincts' in political situations. Managers confessed that they no longer thought about it as 'politics' on a daily basis. They were more open and comfortable to experiment with various ways of engaging in politics, with led to increased

versatility of their influence skills. At the same time, there were indications that individuals had resolved many of the struggles related to authenticity in political engagement.

Overall, the typical approach to politics was a pro-active one, relying on anticipation of political threats and opportunities which needed to be strategically managed and leveraged on. However, it must be stressed that although the attitudes composing political will were generally more conducive to political engagement, engagement in politics was selective and measured. Many participants stressed the importance of 'picking your battles'. In addition, with an increase in managerial seniority came not only increased exposure to politics, but also added structural power and thus a warranted sense of agency in handling politics.

Relationship between will and skill

Before concluding the discussion of the maturation model, a succinct clarification is called for in order to elucidate the relationship between will and skill, represented with two dotted arrows in Figure 5-2 above. First, these two are to some extent interdependent in their structure and evolution. Specifically, political awareness is the *sine qua non* requirement for political will to emerge in any shape or form. Moreover, authenticity - as a dimension of skilled engagement - was derived from ethical beliefs and emotional experience. Second, given the conceptualization of political will, there is an implicit assumption that political will drives engagement, and therefore precedes political skill. Additionally, there was also evidence of reinforcing effects, whereby confirmation of one's political skill made individuals more willing to engage in politics, by increasing their comfort and self-confidence. Indeed, several managers commented on the fact that experience enabled them not only to be more skilled at dealing with politics, but also being more confident that they can navigate politics and therefore less reluctant to engage. Therefore, political self-efficacy is the basis of this reciprocal determinism. Ferris et al. (1989) speculated that employees who feel that they understand the political game have an increased sense of control and thus experience fewer negative

reactions. My study brought empirical evidence to this assertion, by demonstrating the interdependence between will and skill.

Finally, the examination of political will and skill in conjuncture and from a dynamic perspective stressed the fact that political skill is a distinctive managerial skill. Due to the unprescribed and almost clandestine nature of politics, political engagement is often seen problematic and requires individuals to rethink their stance on politics (functional and ethical beliefs) and take stock of the emotional experience of politics. As such, political will is critically important to understanding how and why individuals go about perfecting their political skill.

5.5.3 Summary

This section discussed the model of political maturation and outlined its contribution to the literature on organizational politics. There is scant research in the field of organizational politics that attempts to unpack how individuals develop political skill and will. The model proposed by this thesis mapped out developmental changes in managers' political will and skill across three distinct stages, relating them to specific triggers of political maturation. The contribution of the model to the literature on organizational politics is threefold.

First, the model *provides a developmental perspective on political will and skill*. At the outset of this chapter, I discussed the relevance of these concepts and their dimensionality as related to extant work on politics. These observations will not be reiterated here, in order to avoid redundancy. What this model adds is a developmental perspective whereby political will and skill are not simply treated like end outcomes, but are examined as evolving sets of attitudes and approaches to politics. In doing so, this study has adopted an exploratory approach and a process-perspective (Van de Ven, 2007), in contrast to the predominantly quantitative approaches and variance-perspectives in the field. This perspective enabled me to offer a qualitative, contextualized understanding of managerial engagement in politics. This responds to prior calls in the field for a more context-sensitive investigation into managerial political experiences

(Ammeter et al, 2002; Buchanan, 1999; Buchanan, 2008). In exploring dynamically political will and skill, the model introduces and substantiates the concept of *political maturation*. Loosely employed before by Mainiero (1994) to refer mostly to executive development, this concept has lacked any further theoretical development. The current study conveys an understanding of political maturation as pertaining to the essential characteristics of effective political actors: political will and political skill (Mintzberg, 1983). By firmly grounding the concept of maturation in relation to these constructs, I was able to specify dimensions, stages and triggers of this maturation process. Extending prior work in the field, the study revealed a number of developmental changes in political skill which partially overlap with the model proposed by Baddley and James (1987) and thus lent empirical support to their typology. In addition, the model contributes to a large body of work on political skill (see section 2.3.5 of the literature review), which employs the political skill model developed by Ferris et al. (2000). While this body of work has established the dimensions of political skill, linking it to a variety of workplace outcomes, my model suggests that there are patterns in how political skill dimensions develop, potentially corresponding to increasing levels of skill sophistication. Specifically, political awareness is a basic component of political skill, which lays the foundation of the maturation process. Comparatively, versatility and authenticity are higher-level dimensions of political skill, which tend to be fully realized only in Stage 3.

Second, the model examines the *intersectionality between political will and skill*, demonstrating how they evolve jointly and making explicit how one [predominantly] drives the other. In addition to carefully tracking the development of will and skill along their dimensions (eight in total), the model also exposed broader mindsets and approaches to politics (i.e. passive, reactive, proactive), resulting from the synthetic interaction of will and skill. These findings respond to prior timid attempts in the field to connect managerial political action to its corresponding cognitive structures. In their theoretical model of political leadership theory, Ammeter et al. (2002) suggest that leaders develop political scripts and strategies, which are constantly revisited to incorporate new experiences. This suggestion did not receive further conceptual

or empirical support. Similarly, Buchanan (2002) used a single case to examine the individual subjective logic-in-action employed in political engagement. My study draws out the beliefs and emotions underpinning political action, thus elucidating how and why political skill and will develop jointly. In doing so, it also reinforces the importance of conceptualizing willingness to engage in politics as an evolving attitudinal phenomenon – given that participants self-reported greater engagement in politics as their attitudes evolved.

Fourth, the study contributes to our understanding of what *triggers political development and maturation*. First, the study demonstrates the relevance of relational and experiential learning in political maturation, thus confirming prior results obtained by Hartley et al. (2007), and analysis provided by Ferris et al. (2002) and Hartley (2009). While these authors examined what factors and methods shape individuals' political, the current study extends these findings by highlighting triggers of political maturation which pertain to the development of both political will and skill. Moreover, besides simply identifying *what* triggers come into play, the study goes some way in explicating *how* these triggers are linked to developmental changes in political will and skill and how these changes unfold. For instance, experiential learning emerged as a critical trigger in Stage 1 and therefore foundational to political maturation. However, relational learning helped individuals to make sense of their political experiences and reconsider their stance, enabling progression from Stage 2 to Stage 3. The model demonstrates that these sources of learning are deeply complementary, but also provides novel data pointing to the relative importance of certain triggers depending on the maturation stage.

Finally, the model also makes a remote contribution to the broader literature on managerial work and politics. Scholars have previously deplored that lack of interest in the political dimension of managerial work (Ferris et al., 1994), calling organizational politics 'the missing discipline of management' (Butcher and Clarke, 1999). The current study sheds some light into the mutual reinforcement between political maturation and managerial experience. In other words, the study confirms that politics are instrumental to performing in managerial roles

(Porter et al., 1981; Luthans, 1988; Butcher and Clarke, 2003; Buchanan and Badham, 2007), but it also shows that managerial experience is a critical ingredient for political maturation. The study provides a fine-grained view into how increasingly complex managerial responsibilities compel individuals to revise their views and approach towards politics.

In summary, this thesis makes a first step toward a model of political maturation. In virtue of the stratified sample used, I developed this model based on accounts of managers at varying levels of seniority (junior, middle, senior). For this purpose, in the data analysis I focused on dynamic changes in both political will and skill, making comparisons between managers of difference seniority and drawing on participants' accounts of learning with regards to politics. The novelty of this developmental perspective applied to politics makes it impossible to compare the model with other similar ones in the field. However, as explained in the prior chapters, my purpose was not to test a pre-existing theory of organizational politics, but rather to tackle ill-developed constructs and to adopt a novel perspective in the field. In line with its exploratory aims, this theoretical contribution of the thesis is a 'suggestive model' (Edmondson and McManus, 2007), which opens up issues for further research rather than testing and refining an established theory. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I discuss in further detail avenues for further research suggested by this maturation model.

5.6 Unpacking the role of gender in organizational politics

As the literature review indicated, politics are critical to acquiring and exerting power in the workplace. At the same time, women's scarcity in managerial ranks and at the highest corporate ranks remains an enduring phenomenon worldwide (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Sealy, Doldor and Vinnicombe, 2009). Given these two observations, the scarcity of academic research on gender and politics is quite surprising. This thesis goes some way in filling this gap.

A constant thread in reporting the findings was to point out various gender differences that emerged in the accounts of male and female managers. In this section, I explain in more detail the significance of these differences in the light of relevant literature in the field of gender in management. In doing so, I explain the role of gender along the themes that have constituted the investigative focus of this thesis: political will and political skill (section 5.6.1), and the political maturation journey (section 5.6.2). Further on, I discuss the contextual nature of the gender patterns observed, by drawing out differences between the two organizational settings of the samples employed (section 5.6.3). I conclude by summarizing how this thesis contributes to extant research by making gender visible and voiced when investigating organizational politics (section 5.6.4).

An interesting finding that emerged was that gender differences appeared to be more pronounced among managers from Semcom. In contrast, the lack of very visible gender patterns among managers from Bevcorp is a finding in itself and calls attention to the importance of organizational context in decoding gender patterns related to politics. Perhaps as telling as the results themselves is how these themes were discussed during the interviews conducted in both companies. I intended to explicitly ask about gender only toward the end of the interview, dedicating most of the interview to discussions about politics, with a view to unpack gender effects by conducting comparative analyses between the accounts of male and female managers subsequently. The key difference between how interviews in the two companies unfolded was that in Semcom, gender-related issues in organizational politics were aired out by female managers before I even had a chance to ask about it. This signals just how salient gender was in the experience these female managers had with organizational politics.

5.6.1 Political will and skill from a gender perspective

In this section I discuss the relevance of gender as related to political will and skill. With regards to **political will** specifically, a notable pattern was that most polarized and negative attitudes toward organizational politics and political

engagement were expressed by female managers in Semcom. The **ethical** and emotional dimensions stood out in particular. That ethical concerns emerged as an integral dimension of managerial political will is particularly significant, given that a number of studies indicated that women tend to be more concerned about ethics in the workplace (Jones and Gautschi, 1988; Peterson, Beltramini and Kozmetsky, 1991; Borkowsky and Ugras, 1998). Due to their unprescribed nature, organizational politics confront managers with a space of moral ambiguity, which is thus likely to raise more hesitation and concern among women.

In addition, the findings also surfaced specific gender differences in ethical reasoning about political engagement. Aligned with the results-oriented culture of the company, both male and female managers in Semcom found that involvement in politics was acceptable to the extent that it enabled them to achieve results. The functional benefits of political activity were thus intertwined with perceived ethicality. All managers valued 'win-win' approaches to reconciling multiple political interests. However, female managers were particularly vehement in condemning political actions driven by pursuits of self-interest, confirming prior results which suggested that a view of politics as pursuit of self-interest is more common among male managers, while female managers tend to define politics by focusing on the dynamics of collaboration and conflict (Hartley et al., 2007). In addition, as Buchanan (2008) suggested, female managers in Semcom appeared more concerned about the victimizing effects of politics. Some of the more senior female managers in Semcom were explicit and deliberate about their efforts to protect or prepare their staff in dealing with politics. What these results depict is a certain ethic of care partially underpinning women's political engagement. In her groundbreaking work on gender differences in moral perspectives, Gilligan (1982) found that individuals whose sense of self is based on connection and interrelatedness draw on principles of responsibility and care, while individuals whose sense of self is based on separation and autonomy employ a rights orientation, informed by abstract and impartial rules of fairness. Women's sense of self, she claimed, is more often derived from connectedness with others, thus making women more

likely than men to adopt a moral perspective of care and responsibility. More recent studies found that gender differences in moral reasoning are particularly pronounced when men and women tackle ethical issues related to social and personal relationships (Smith and Oakley, 1997).

While this explanation sheds some light into the differences between the ethical concerns underpinning the political engagement of male and female managers in Semcom, it does not account for the lack of such patterns among respondents in Bevcorp. Was an ethic of care less important to female managers in Bevcorp? The answer, it appears, lies in the context. A few female managers in Bevcorp believed that men were prepared to be more ruthless in their political pursuits, yet this was expressed more as a general opinion rather than as an integral, vivid part of the experiences that had shaped their views on politics. Overall, the political landscapes in which these women managers operated differed in a few, but significant ways (as discussed in section 4.3 of the Findings chapter). Bevcorp valued relationships and partnerships, promoted 'freedom to succeed' and encouraged employees to 'assume positive intent', seek consensus and build alignment in working with others. Semcom placed a premium on achieving results, allowed employees to 'disagree and commit' and encouraged 'risk-taking', which entailed, if necessary, the possibility of challenging others on failure to deliver results. These nuances in corporate values resulted in a political culture which was more confrontational in Semcom and more collaborative in Bevcorp. As such, it is plausible that the nature of political dynamics in Semcom may have been more incompatible with an ethic of care. In contrast, the political context in Bevcorp was less likely to violate principles of morality based on responsibility and care, consequently making these ethical principles a less salient issue in women's assessment of politics.

Further on, with regards to the **emotional** dimension, involvement in politics entailed an emotional strain for most managers, regardless of gender, to the extent that it required them to go out of their comfort zone – particularly at the early stages of their career. So a degree of discomfort caused by the learning curve associated with the maturation process was not gender-specific.

However, a range of negative reactions to politics expressed by female managers in Semcom were clearly related to gender. First, these negative reactions stemmed from the nature of political experiences encountered by women, which were often related to gender inequalities in the workplace. I will address in more detail the gendered nature of critical political experiences in section 5.6.2 below, when discussing the triggers of political maturation. In addition, many of these women found political engagement to be emotionally draining because political behaviours were seen to be consistent with masculine norms (Alvesson, 1998), making politics a masculine enterprise. One female manager powerfully described politics as ‘a man’s thing’, saying that in her view politics had always been ‘about men, and white shirts and ties’. This is consistent with the study conducted by Mackenzie Davey (2008), who found that female business graduates in male-dominated organizations tend to construe politics as aggressive, competitive and compatible with masculine behaviours. In addition, my study offers evidence that these findings do not necessarily hold true in an organizational context that is not particularly masculine.

The discomfort with politics as a masculine enterprise, relevant to understanding one facet of political will, was also intimately linked with authentic engagement – one of the dimensions of political skill. Though considered an essential ingredient of political skill, **authenticity** in political engagement appeared, in some ways, more out of reach for women. Again, this was more noticeable among female managers from Semcom. Discussing women’s need to feel authentic at work, Ibarra (2000) found that women in professional services chose ‘true-to-self’ strategies when trying to advance as partners, but noticed that ‘chameleon-like’ strategies –preferred by men- were more efficient for this purpose. Social role theory (Eagly, 1987) offers a compelling explanation as to why some female managers from Semcom felt they could not be themselves when engaging in politics. This theory posits that individuals hold consensual descriptive beliefs about the attributes men and women hold and normative expectations about the behaviours men and women should display (Eagly and Karau, 2002). In brief, these gender stereotypes or roles depict men

as agentic, forceful, assertive, and women as communal, kind and gentle. Descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes obstruct women's progression on the organizational ladder (Heilman, 2001). The challenge stems from the fact that leadership and management roles are thought to require more agentic than communal qualities, thereby creating a perceived incompatibility between the requirements of leadership roles and stereotypically feminine qualities. Sex stereotyping of managerial jobs in particular has been extensively documented: across various cultures, both men and women tend to think that the characteristics of successful middle managers are more likely to be held by men in general than by women in general (Schein, 1973; Schein and Muller, 1992; Schein, 2001, 2007).

The findings of my thesis suggest that a similar perceived incongruence between 'feminine' behaviours and political behaviours may pose a challenge to female managers, to the extent that political engagement requires women to step out of their normative gender role. Supporting this thesis is a number of comments made by several female managers in Semcom. One of them confessed disliking women who engage in politics, and explained her dislike by drawing on an expressive metaphor: 'it's okay to see a guy drunk, but it's horrid to see a drunk woman'. This gives evidence of a blatant double standard in perceptions of political actors. Other women did not shy away from politics on the grounds that it is 'a male strength', but remained mindful of how their political actions could be perceived in light of gender expectations. Discussing personal involvement in politics, one female manager declared not wanting to 'behave like a bloke', while another one was aware that others will perceive her 'as an aggressive woman, rather than an aggressive manager'. Navigating these gendered expectations required conscious effort and self-monitoring – an added emotional cost for female managers who did not want to opt out of politics. However, this deliberate management of gendered expectations was seen by some women as jeopardizing their ability to be themselves. These findings, therefore, illustrate how role incongruity can be a source of relational inauthenticity (Eagly, 2005), with regards to political engagement specifically. In addition, the findings also suggest that women who do engage in politics are at

risk of being negatively perceived, not only by men, but also by other women. In an experimental study, Drory and Beaty (1991) found that men and women were more tolerant of political behaviour when exhibited by members of their own gender, thus displaying 'potential gender solidarity' (p. 257). My findings suggest that this argument is too simplistic and that women who do not conform to gender expectations when engaging in politics may be penalized even by members of their own sex.

Another dimension of political skill that deserves attention from a gender perspective is **developing networks and relationships**. As previously discussed in section 5.4, female managers - more often than their male counterparts - appeared less prepared to engage in the sort of activities required to develop these networks and relationships. For example, female managers in both companies discussed their reluctance to proactively network without an obvious work-related rationale, or to deliver presentations and engage with more senior stakeholders for the sole purpose of raising their visibility. This confirms prior studies which have highlighted gender differences in the way individuals develop and use networks (Burt, 1998; Ibarra, 1997) and in their readiness to engage in impression management in the workplace (Singh et al., 2002; Guadagno and Cialdini, 2007). In Semcom, an added difficulty faced by women was breaking into networks often centred around masculine activities such as golf. Ibarra (1993) suggested that the challenges faced by women and minorities in developing networks in the workplace are created by the organizational context in which these networks develop and function. Similarly, other studies confirmed that one of the challenges encountered by women when developing social capital is the difficulty of fitting in with organizational cultures which are masculine (Lyness and Thompson, 1997). As one female executive put it: 'While men create the culture, women adapt to it' (Manuel, Shefte and Swiss, 1999 in Eagly and Carli, 2007).

5.6.2 The maturation journey from a gender perspective

The differences emerging from the dimensional analysis of political will and skill have relevance to understanding how the maturation journey unfolds for men and women, by focusing on **stages** and **triggers**. In doing so, this thesis offers a contribution to the field of organizational politics by drawing on research in the area of gender in management.

The analysis revealed that for many female managers in Semcom, the critical political experiences that had triggered their basic political awareness were gendered. By this, I draw attention to the fact that gender is entrenched in organizational practices and processes, as pointed out by Acker (1990, p. 149) in her theory of gendered organizations:

‘To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine.’

With regards to the maturation journey, the gendered nature of **critical political experiences** essentially refers to the fact that the situations that made female managers attuned to the political dimension of the workplace represented practices and processes stemming from and perpetuating power gender inequalities (Acker, 1990; West and Zimmerman, 1987). These experiences set women on their maturation path, being most often associated with the stage of **Naiveté and Discovery**. For instance, women spoke about missing promotion opportunities because of biased judgments about their competence made by male bosses. They also spoke about being excluded from the ‘old boys’ club’, being assigned ‘domestic’ responsibilities in meetings with other male colleagues and struggling to establish their credibility as managers overall. In Marshall’s (1984) words, these women managers were ‘travellers in a male world’.

As such, for these women, the political maturation journey was intertwined with discovering and learning how to navigate a masculine culture. Throughout the three stages, women's strategies of coping with the embedded masculinity of political practices transitioned as well. The change was typically from overt resistance (denouncing the 'old boys' club') to reluctant acceptance (being more proactive about impression management just like their male colleagues), and finally to a more serene yet gender-aware engagement in politics. This alerts us to the criticality of stage two of the maturation journey – **Coping and Endurance** – as a potential turning point for women who struggle to come to terms with a political game defined in masculine terms. In addition, a few senior female managers appeared to have found ways of negotiating the gender complexities inherent to political engagement. For instance, they mentioned asking for unnecessary help of the golf field to establish rapport with male colleagues in a non-threatening way, or buffering perceptions of being 'an aggressive woman' by being 'so unbelievably nice that it makes you feel sick' when engaging in politics. Perhaps surprisingly, they also saw tokenism and engrained gender prejudice as conferring women an advantage in that it led men to underestimate women as political players. The symbolic significance of these coping mechanisms can be better understood by drawing on Gherardi's (1994) concepts of ceremonial and remedial gender work. Essentially, Gherardi proposed that gender orders are maintained and restructured in organizations through everyday behaviours that either pay homage to existing arrangements and inequalities (ceremonial gender work), or attempt to challenge and repair these structural inequalities (remedial gender work). The shrewd strategies employed by senior female managers in Semcom to cope with a masculine culture illustrate how political action blurs the boundaries between ceremonial and remedial gender work. Their political tactics were ceremonial in that they seemingly complied with normative expectations of femininity (being nice, being unthreatening). At the same time, they were remedial, in that women deliberately adopted these behaviours in order to succeed as managers and ultimately disrupt gender inequalities.

Finally, a last aspect of the maturation process that is particularly relevant from a gender perspective refers to the importance of **mentors and role models** as a developmental trigger. Mentoring and role modelling emerged as important sources of relational learning about organizational politics. It is known that connectedness is particularly important in women's ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986). However, there is also an array of evidence demonstrating that women have less access to mentors and role models in the workplace, especially in male-dominated settings (Kanter, 1977; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989; Ely, 1995; Sealy, 2009). The findings of the current study suggested that female managers in Semcom generally had fewer individuals whose political behaviours felt they could emulate. However, the few women who were less averse to politics had benefited from mentoring and were also mindful to mentor their staff into politics. In contrast, although more junior men stressed the importance of being mentored into politics, none of the more senior male managers mentioned this aspect. While this doesn't necessarily mean that male managers do not provide mentoring and support to their subordinates with regards to politics, it suggests that the idea of purposefully being a political mentor might be less salient to male managers. Again, the embedded masculinity of political practices might make these more visible in the eyes of women, and less visible to men.

5.6.3 The critical role of context

The analysis along various dimensions of political will and skill demonstrated that while differences emerged as specific to women and men as individuals, these differences need to be understood as related to organizational context. Overall, gender differences were more salient among managers in Semcom compared to Bevcorp and were closely related to a masculine organizational culture. Interestingly, male participants were oblivious to the gendered nature of politics, illustrating how the masculine norms embedded in politics remain invisible and unquestioned (Simpson and Lewis, 2005), especially among those who benefit most from the status quo. Men, or masculinity, were the 'hidden referent' (Spender, 1984, in Powell, 1999) in the political game. A male

manager from Semcom insisted on the absence of gender differences in how politics unfold, stating that 'we all have a pretty similar way of working (...) we all have the same code of conduct'. While the output-oriented ethos was indeed visible to all managers, the masculine culture was visible only to the female managers interviewed, confirming the notion of 'the same workplace, different realities' for men and women of the corporation (Catalyst, 2004).

In contrast, indicative of the more gender-inclusive culture in Bevcorp were not only women's accounts, in which gender did not appear strikingly problematic, but also the accounts of male managers interviewed. Without being specifically asked about it, several of the men commented on the gender imbalance at top levels of the company and wondered whether and how that might affect women's view of the organization in general, and politics in particular. This signals a gender awareness which is likely to yield more inclusive informal dynamics, thus changing the nature of the political game compared to Semcom. For example, one male manager was particularly mindful of how an emphasis on relationships – defining from Bevcorp's culture – might be challenging for individuals from specific social groups, including women:

One of the dangers of an organisation that is highly networked and also leverages on relationships is, particularly for those who are of a particular gender or a particular nationality... I think that can be quite tough for people to penetrate, people who are not from the same group. For anybody coming into an organisation that is very informally driven, it's quite impenetrable in some ways. (...) Again, back to this unconscious bias issue - different races, genders, build relationships in different ways. (Sam, senior manager, Bevcorp)

Overall, differences between the two organizational contexts – Bevcorp and Semcom – were conveyed by a range of factors: sheer gender demographics¹⁰, official corporate values, informal interactions. These factors resulted in two

¹⁰ As explained in the Methodology chapter, Bevcorp had more women in managerial positions than Semcom (approximately 30% and 20% respectively). While the difference may not appear large in absolute numbers, it is sufficient to change the dysfunctional group dynamics caused by tokenism (Kanter, 1977).

distinct political landscapes that chiefly differed in the extent to which they were masculine or seemingly inclusive.

The significance of these findings pertaining to the context of politics could be better grasped by drawing on the concept of 'political influence compatibility', proposed by Christiansen, Villanova and Mikulay (1997). The authors explored the fit between personal preference for influence tactics and the corporate political climate by using the taxonomy proposed by Kipnis and Schmidt (1988). They found that congruence between personal influence preferences and corporate political climate correlates positively with satisfaction with co-workers. The notion of political influence compatibility may be relevant in understanding women's attitudes toward organizational politics in Semcom, in light of the incompatibility between their preferences and the masculine nature of politics.

The contrast in gender patterns associated with organizational context points to the inadequacy of generalized and decontextualized arguments about women's ability or willingness to engage in politics. This study demonstrates that gender per se, as a taxonomic variable, is an obstacle only to the extent that organizational processes and norms adversely shape the nature of the political climate women are confronted to. While a masculine organizational culture left an indelible mark on their political journeys in Semcom, this did not appear to be the case in Bevcorp. This calls for an understanding of politics and gender that is not only person-centred, but also situation-centred, inviting researchers, yet again, to shift the focus from 'fixing the women' to 'fixing the culture' (Ely, Foldi and Scully, 2003).

5.6.4 Summary

In this section I discussed the contribution made by this thesis to unpacking the role of gender in managers' experiences with organizational politics, a theme previously tackled only by a handful of studies, which were either theoretical or have used female-only samples (Arroba and James, 1988; Mann, 1995; Perrewe and Nelson, 2004; Mainiero, 1998; MacKinzie Davey, 2008). In doing so, I drew on literature from the field of gender in management to examine the

role of gender as related to the key concepts tackled in this study: political will, political skill and political maturation (stages and triggers).

This study dismantled the myths about women's alleged political skill deficiency or lack of political appetite, given that several female managers appeared as willing and as able as their male counterpart to engage in politics. However, what this study demonstrated is that the development of political will and skill is paved with gender-specific hurdles, leading some women to opt out of the political game. Specific elements that stood out were gender differences in ethical reasoning and in approaches to building networks and relationships; more negative emotional experiences of politics and struggles to find an authentic style of engaging in politics among women; and critical political experiences of a gendered nature, as well as potentially unequal access to mentoring and role modelling in the political arena. There was one unifying theme across all these obstacles: organizational context. Namely, gender differences appeared particularly salient among managers in Semcom, whose organizational culture was described as more masculine than the one in Bevcorp. As such, the study demonstrated that gender becomes an obstacle in managers' political maturation only to the extent that structural gender inequalities are embedded in organizational norms and processes, defining the political game in masculine terms.

A majority of studies in mainstream approaches to organizational politics do not consider gender as a lens of analysis, thus making an implicit assumption that politics are a gender-free phenomenon. The findings of this study demonstrate that such an assumption is unwarranted. The study elucidates why gender matters in better understanding how managers deal with organizational politics; it also suggests that gender needs to be understood in conjuncture with organizational context and not merely as an abstract demographical variable. Furthermore, these findings also suggest that organizational politics can be a powerful analytical lens in investigating gender in management.

5.7 Contribution to knowledge from a critical realist perspective

The theoretical contribution of this thesis needs to be understood not only in relation to existing literature in the field, but also in light of the epistemological and methodological choices stated in Chapter 3. In this section I briefly explain the theoretical contribution of this thesis as supported by the critical realist philosophical perspective and the qualitative methodology employed.

5.7.1 Generative mechanisms and explanatory claims

As discussed in section 3.2.2 of this thesis, critical realism essentially argues that there is an independently existing social reality. Knowledge mediates, albeit in approximate ways, access to this reality. This philosophical perspective adopts a stratified ontology by positing three domains of reality: empirical, actual and real. The epistemic aim of critical realist research is to enable the journey from the surface level of observable facts (the empirical) toward the deeper level of underlying invisible mechanisms (the real) (Reed, 2009). As such, critical realism first requires identifying empirical regularities pertaining to the phenomena investigated. In the current research, these have been grasped by mapping out the dimensions of political will and skill from managers' accounts. Empirical regularities were also critical in finding common developmental patterns of political will and skill, which describe the political maturation journey.

Albeit useful, detecting empirical regularities is insufficient. The critical realist researcher is tasked with discerning the underlying generative mechanisms that produce the empirical patterns observed (Harre, 1970; Sayer, 2000). In this study, I have endeavoured to do so by linking the dimensionality of political will and skill and their maturation patterns to specific triggers of maturation (critical political experiences, managerial role demands and mentors and role models). I specifically described and explained how and why these triggers shaped political will and skill and the progression through the proposed stages of maturation, thus being consistent with the both the tenets of critical realism (Archer et al., 1998) and the requirements of process research (Langley, 2009).

In addition, I demonstrated how organizational context and gender both act as generative mechanisms, to the extent that they shape the nature of political maturation triggers managers are exposed to. I particularly stressed how the impact of gender is context-dependent. Gender was treated not only as a taxonomic variable (i.e. comparison between male and female subgroups), but also as a 'social and relational phenomenon' (Danermark et al., p. 169) which enabled me to explore how social practices around sex differences which create gender orders (New, 2004) impact the experiences of male and female managers with politics, in specific organizational contexts. In summary, the findings of this study and the proposed interpretation are aligned with critical realists' claim that generative mechanisms are dynamic and interdependent (Danermark et al., 2002; Reed, 2009).

In seeking to identify generative mechanisms, critical realists propose explanations for observed patterns of events, behaviours, attitudes. Explanation is understood as having added conceptual power compared to mere description, yet being different from prediction (Danermark et al., 2002). Given the open nature of social systems, it is impossible to isolate invariable causal laws that allow for meticulous prediction. Instead, description and explanation through the lens of generative mechanisms is always context-specific (Tsang and Kwan, 1999; Reed, 2009). What this means with regards to the current study is that I do not claim to predict, in virtue of the maturation model, how political maturation occurs for all managers, in all contexts. What I do claim is to have explained how and why political maturation occurred for the managers interviewed, who operated in their specific organizational contexts. As the findings of the study indicated, context shapes to a large extent the experiences managers have with organizational politics, and consequently their political will, skill and maturation journey.

In addition, the investigation of poorly defined constructs such as political will often requires a concern for theoretical generalization as opposed to numerical one (Flick, 2005), typical for a nascent field of research (Edmonson and MacManus, 2007). In other words, my aim was to propose a conceptualization

of political will that has theoretical and explanatory power, and not to produce a generalizable measure of managerial political will by using statistically representative samples.

5.7.2 Individual meanings and analytical abstraction

Lewin (1936) famously argued that individuals respond to reality on the basis of their beliefs about it, and not to reality per se. Critical realism affirms the importance of subjectivity and individual meanings, while at the same time calling for analytical abstraction in order to propose theoretical explanations that transcend individual meanings (Danermark et al., 2002). Current micro-perspectives on politics predominantly make epistemological and methodological choices that convey a concern for 'objectivity', and rely on the isolation and measurement of variables generally defined a priori by researchers. As argued in previous chapters, this is particularly problematic given the controversial nature of politics and the lack of agreement over the definition of organizational politics. Ferris et al. (2002) note, however, that reliance on a negative definition of politics in organizations has been a shortcoming of the research in the field. Challenging this claim to 'objectivity' in quantitative social science, Patton (2002, p. 574) observed:

'All statistical data are based on *someone's* definition of what to measure and how to measure it.' (original emphasis)

Concurring with this view, the philosophical perspective and method employed in the current study enabled me to grasp individuals' meanings pertaining to politics – from the very definition of the concept of organizational politics, to meanings about the maturation journey. Critically, the proposed conceptualization of political will relied on the epistemological principle that managers are self-reflective and make sense of their political experiences by developing beliefs and attitudes toward politics and political engagement.

While I drew on these subjective meanings, I also transcended them by detecting common patterns in individual meanings and experiences and by

proposing theoretically-informed interpretations and explanations about generative mechanisms (as explained above). This analytical abstraction relied on a transition from categorizing to interpreting the qualitative data, as described by Ritchie and Lewis (2003).

5.7.3 Process perspective

In the Methodology chapter, I noticed that most research in the field of organizational politics has been conducted from a variance perspective. In contrast to variance studies, who offer a snapshot current view into the phenomena investigated, process studies are concerned with how phenomena evolve temporally (Langley, 2009; Van de Ven, 1992). Process research has typically dealt with organizational processes such as strategic change. However this perspective is increasingly adopted in studying individual-level phenomena (see Isabella, 1990 on phases of sense-making related to organizational change; or Pratt, Rockman and Kaufman, 2006 on identity construction among medical residents).

To the best of my knowledge, the current study represents the first process approach in the field of organizational politics, due to its focus on developmental patterns of political maturation. In virtue of its developmental perspective, the study calls attention to the importance of investigating not only if and why managers *are* willing and able to engage in politics, but also how managers *become* willing and skilled to engage in the political arena.

5.7.4 Context

As indicated by the literature review, most studies of organizational politics fail to account for the role of context, a frequent shortcoming in studies of individual behaviour in organizations (Whetten, Felin and King, 2009). In the myriad of North-American journal articles reviewed for this thesis, most references to context were limited to a few lines of acknowledgement of the sector from which their samples were drawn. This is typical for quantitative studies that are generally concerned with testing hypotheses across settings in order to enable

for statistical generalization. However, these studies leave us ill informed about how managerial will and skill are shaped and expressed into real organizational settings.

The current study attempted to overcome this limitation by employing a qualitative exploratory approach. In reporting and interpreting the findings, I consistently reported and explained to role of context, in discussing the differences between the accounts of managers from Semcom and Bevcorp, particularly from a gender perspective (though not only). In doing so, I employed contrastive explanation, defined by Danermark and collaborators (2002, p. 166) as a way of accounting for 'the fact that conditions for one group in society differ from that of another group'. This constant comparison proved useful in illuminating the context-related generative mechanisms which shaped managers' political will, skill and maturation journey.

Heath and Sitkin (2001) criticized the neglect of context in organizational behaviour (OB) research, calling for more 'Big O' research (Ob) – focused on the context - as opposed to the prevalent 'Big B' research (oB) – focused on the individual. In this study, I hope to have gone same way in mitigating this challenge in focus. Although the level of analysis in my study was the individual/manager, individual accounts were systematically contextualized throughout the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

5.7.5 Reflexivity

Instead of claiming objectivity and detachment in my approach to research, I endeavoured to remain mindful of and account for how my own subjectivity came into play in conducting the doctoral project. After all, critical realism is 'value aware' (Danermak et al., 2002), unlike positivism that claims to be value-free and constructivism that sees itself as value-laden (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

It was perhaps both a strength and a challenge the fact that the concept of 'organizational politics' does not exist as such in my mother tongue, Romanian.

A challenge, because it required conscious effort to actually grasp it. A strength, because that meant that I did not have a priori negative connotations and I was able to weigh the definitional debates of the term with a rather curious eye.

In conducting the interviews, I sometimes found my own implicit assumptions about age, seniority, or gender challenged by participants. My own interviewing skills developed throughout the data collection process. I learnt to be less concerned about adhering closely to the interview protocol and more comfortable exploring what appeared relevant to participants, while keeping in mind the overall aims of the research. Inevitably, this meant that richness of the data collected was slightly different from the first to the last interview conducted. In analyzing the data, I might have made implicit value judgements about which behaviours and attitudes are more indicative of political maturation. In order to mitigate this, I tried to stay as close to the data as possible and ensure that I based my model on what respondent themselves described as learning and development in views and approaches to organizational politics.

Finally, investigating this topic as a female researcher may have had an influence of my perspective on the research topic and the data collected. One study suggested that female managers tend to define organizational politics by focusing more on the dynamics of conflict and collaboration, while male managers defined it by focusing on pursuit of self-interest (Hartley et al., 2007). As such, I might have been inclined myself to frame politics in a similar way. However, calling attention to the gendered nature of knowledge production (Adams and Burnett, 1991)¹¹, I note that research on organizational politics has traditionally been conducted by male researchers on male samples and has privileged a view of politics as ruthless and antisocial, employing a rather belligerent language to refer to the topic. Mangham (1979, p. 15) described politics as 'man's [*sic*] evident capacity, and occasional ardent desire, to screw his fellow man'. Ferris and King (1991) spoke about politics as 'the dark side' of organizational life, while Buchanan and Badham (2007) referred to the issue by

¹¹ In a study of socio-historical factors influencing the production of science, these authors observed that female primatologists tend to describe natural systems using much more cooperative terms compared to their male colleagues.

mentioning ‘devious tactics’ and being ‘professionally nasty’. Perhaps increasing diversity among researchers and the samples employed in the field will gradually bring a different voice to the study of organizational politics.

5.8 Summary

This chapter discussed the theoretical contributions made by the thesis, as related to the bodies of literature the study engaged with. The areas of contribution have been divided into four major categories, essentially related to political will, political skill, political maturation and gender. The theoretical significance of the findings and the claims made by the study were also discussed in light of the philosophical approach and the methodology employed. Table 5-1 below provides a high-level summary of the theoretical contributions outlined in this chapter.

Table 5-1 Summary of theoretical contributions

Area of contribution	Description
Political will	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposing new conceptualization Mapping out dimensionality Developmental perspective
Political skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refining dimensionality Developmental perspective
Political maturation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying three distinct stages of political maturation Describing developmental patterns of political will and skill along these stages Identifying triggers of political maturation
Gender and politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying gender differences in the accounts of male and female managers Illuminating gender-related obstacles in the development of political will and skill
Philosophical perspective and methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empirical patterns: mapping out dimensions and developmental trends of political will and skill Generative mechanisms: triggers of maturation, gender and organizational context Attention to context and individual meanings Introducing a novel process/developmental approach Value-aware research, reflexivity

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

In the previous five chapters of the thesis, I explained how the doctoral research project was designed and conducted, presented the results of the study and articulated the theoretical contribution offered by this thesis. In this chapter, I conclude the thesis by briefly restating the research problem tackled and providing an overview of the study and its theoretical contribution. I then examine the practical implications of the findings. Further on, I discuss the limitations of the current study and suggest directions for future research. I finalize this chapter, and the thesis, by commenting on my personal learning throughout the doctoral process.

6.2 Research problem

The overarching aim of this thesis was to better understand how managers deal with organizational politics, and to do so by taking into account gender. The literature reviewed in the field of organizational politics surfaced a number of areas where further investigation was called for. First, I took notice that up to date research has been mostly concerned with how managers engage in politics (actual skill and behaviours), and less with what drives them to engage in it. Yet, Mintzberg (1983) argued, simply and compellingly, that effective political actors need both political will and political skill. Political will remains however an underdeveloped concept and research into antecedents of political behaviours is fraught with limitations due to an excessive focus on dispositional approaches. Consequently, I proposed that a more stringent indication of managers' willingness to engage in politics consists in exploring attitudes toward organizational politics and toward engaging in politics. Second, while political skill is a more developed construct in the field, I observed that there are inconsistencies between the various models of political skill. Third, I detected that prior research on managers and organizational politics has largely ignored the issue of development. For example, researchers endeavoured to specify

what it means to be politically skilled, yet without examining how one becomes politically skilled. Overall, I also noticed that research in the field of organizational politics provides little insight into how gender comes into play in managers' approach to politics. As a result of these observations, I formulated the following research questions to be addressed by the doctoral study:

RQ1: What attitudes toward organizational politics and engagement in politics comprise political will for male and female managers?

RQ2: What does skilled political engagement entail for male and female managers?

RQ3: How do political will and skill develop for male and female managers?

6.3 Overview of the study and its contribution

The empirical study undertook a critical realist approach and employed a qualitative methodology, consisting of 38 semi-structured interviews with managers in two companies (20 women and 18 men). Broadly speaking, the interviews explored how managers viewed and approached organizational politics, as well as how their views and approach had changed in time. The aim was to tap into both attitudes and behaviours related to politics, and to capture their development and thereby the crystallization of political will and political skill. The data analysis was conducted using a Template Analysis approach supported by NVivo software, and aimed to identify key themes conveying political will and skill, as well as to map out patterns of development related to these two aspects.

The findings addressed the research questions formulated and led to four key theoretical contributions. First, I proposed a more stringent conceptualization of **political will**, which relied on eliciting managers' attitudes toward politics and political engagement. This conceptualization endeavoured to overcome the limitations of dispositional approaches in the field, which have ascribed

individual engagement in politics to generic personality dispositions such as need for power, need for achievement, locus of control and Machiavellianism. Instead, I argued that managers' actual approach to politics is more closely informed by their attitudes towards organizational politics and toward engaging in politics. The exploratory study provided empirical support to this novel conceptualization of political will, identifying three attitudinal dimensions which define managers' willingness (or lack thereof) to engage in politics: functional, ethical and emotional. The functional dimension refers to managers' beliefs about the outcomes of political engagement (i.e. politics as useful or disruptive). The ethical dimension refers to managers' beliefs about the moral implications of political engagement (i.e. politics as right or wrong). The emotional dimension refers to managers' affective experience of politics (i.e. politics as stressful or enjoyable). While prior studies in the field suggested that managers are aware of the usefulness of political engagement (Porter et al., 1980; Buchanan, 2000, 2008; Harlley, 2007), the dimensions of political will identified in the current study demonstrate that functional concern are not the only considerations driving managerial engagement in politics; equally important in understanding managerial willingness to engage in politics are managers' ethical reasoning regarding the nature of political engagement, as well as their emotional experience associated with it. Unlike dispositional approaches that imply a context-free relation between certain dispositions and political behaviours, the conceptualization of political will proposed and substantiated by this study, offered a context-dependent perspective on what exactly makes managers more or less willing to engage in politics, by capturing their attitudes toward political engagement as related to the political landscape of their organizations.

Second, the study refined the concept of **political skill** by mapping out its dimensions and discussing how they relate to previous models of political skill. The accounts of the managers interviewed pointed out five dimensions as indicative of skilled political engagement: political awareness, developing networks and relationships, building alignment, versatile influence and authenticity. Situated within extant literature on political skill, these findings suggest that the nature and dimensionality of political skill are closely

dependent upon the level of managerial seniority. Specifically, compared to the political skill model developed by Ferris et al. (2000, 2007) on non-managerial samples, the current findings proposed 'building alignment' as an added dimension. Moreover, employing a sample of very senior managers, Hartley et al. (2007) proposed that 'strategic scanning and direction' constitute a dimension of political skill essentially related to the strategic management of the organization, yet this dimension was not identified in the current study. These overlaps and differences suggest that political skill needs to be understood as related to the level of seniority of managerial roles. As such, the current study illuminated the aspects of political skill that are particularly relevant in middle management roles. In addition, by stressing the importance of authenticity as an essential ingredient of skilled political action, the findings add depth of insight into the nature of political skill dimensions proposed by Ferris and collaborators. While these authors suggested that apparent or perceived genuineness is a dimension of political skill, my findings showed that, from the perspective of managers as political actors, what matters when engaging in politics are personal feelings of authenticity and genuineness, rather than external perceptions of these. Finally, the current study also enriched current understanding of political skill by examining the concept from a developmental perspective. Prior models of political skill tackled the concept statically, by focusing on the end state of *having* political skill, rather than on the process of *becoming* politically skilled. In contrast, the current study brought insight into how political skill develops for managers. This specific contribution is discussed in greater detail below.

This thesis made a third theoretical contribution to the field of organizational politics by proposing a **model of political maturation**. This model emerged as a result of examining how the managers interviewed developed willingness and ability to engage in politics. In other words, the concepts of political will and political skill were not examined only statically, by extracting their key dimensions, but also dynamically, by mapping out how these dimensions evolved in time. By employing a sample of managers at varying levels of seniority and by eliciting retrospective accounts about their experiences with

politics, I was able to capture a myriad of attitudes and approaches to politics, indicative of the dynamic aspect of both political will and skill. The analysis revealed that developmental changes along the key dimensions of political will and skill crystallized into broader, evolving patterns, suggestive of three stages of political maturation: Naiveté and Discovery, Coping and Endurance, and Leveraging and Proficiency. By tracking developmental changes along all of the identified dimensions of political will and skill (eight in total), the model provided a granular view into this stage-like maturation process. Broadly speaking, with regards to political will, managers appeared to progress from viewing politics as being in itself unethical and dysfunctional (Stage One) to making contextual judgements about the usefulness and ethicality of politics (Stage Three). During the journey, managers experienced ambivalence and duality about these ethical and functional considerations, as well as in their emotional reactions to politics (Stage Two). At the level of political skill, they progressed from an incipient awareness with little deliberate engagement (Stage One), to a more refined awareness and increased ability to build networks and relationships, and to create alignment (Stage Two), culminating in a sense of authentic engagement and versatility in exercising influence (Stage Three). In addition to describing these stages, the model identified triggers which led to this maturation, chiefly managerial role demands, critical political experiences and mentors and role models. In doing so, this study pointed out the interdependence between experiential and relational learning during the political maturation process. Therefore, in a novel approach to examining managerial engagement in politics, this model introduces a developmental perspective currently lacking in the literature on organizational politics. The model not only provides an indication of what it means to be willing to engage in politics and to be skilled at it; it also charts the milestones on the journey to getting there.

Finally, the fourth contribution of this study consisted in **unpacking the impact of gender in managers' political will, skill, and maturation journey**, thereby addressing an important, but largely ignored aspect of managerial political engagement. Up to date only two empirical studies have tackled the link between gender and organizational politics (Mainiero, 1994; MacKinzie Davey,

2008), and both of them have used female-only samples. Employing a gender-mixed sample, the current study revealed gender differences in managers' ethical reasoning about politics, whereby an ethic of care and concern about the victimizing effects of politics were more frequent among female managers. With regards to political skill, while female managers considered networks and relationships important; they did not always seem prepared to engage in certain behaviours required to build these networks and relationships (i.e. impression management, influencing upwards). Some women also struggled to a greater extent than their male counterparts to find an authentic style of engaging in politics. These gender differences were particularly salient in the sample of managers from Semcom. In light of the particularities of the organizational context, these context-dependent gender differences appeared to be related to a more masculine working culture in Semcom, compared to Bevcorp. This masculine culture exposed female managers to a range of critical political experiences of a gendered nature (old boys' club, tokenism, gender stereotypes and prejudice) and resulted in the political game being defined in masculine terms. Hence, structural gender inequalities left an indelible mark on the political maturation journey of these female managers. In elucidating why gender matters in better understanding how managers deal with organizational politics, the current study suggests that gender needs to be understood as an embedded part of organizational norms and processes and not merely as an abstract demographical variable. Refuting essentialist explanations about women's political skill deficit or lack of political appetite, this study demonstrates that organizational context and the nature of the political landscape in which individuals operate are critical in understanding gender differences in managers' political will and skill, as well as the nature of their maturation journey. However, the primary aim of this thesis was not to theorize about gender, but to make gender visible and voiced in a study of organizational politics. As such, the thesis contributes to the field of organizational politics, but in doing so it draws on literature from the field of gender in management.

In summary, this thesis has achieved its aims by addressing the research questions formulated and by offering four theoretical contributions to the field of

organizational politics. In the previous chapter, I also explained how these findings and contributions are consistent with the critical realist approach and qualitative methodology adopted in the current study, thereby clarifying the claims of the thesis and ascertaining its philosophical and methodological coherence.

6.4 Implications for practice

Given the criticality of organizational politics in managerial roles, the findings of the current study are relevant for practice in that they provide a number of insights into how to better equip managers to handle organizational politics through executive education, training, coaching, or mentoring. To begin with, I would observe that several of the managers interviewed in the current study explicitly deplored the lack of preparation and support in dealing with organizational politics. This points toward a gap in preparing managers to deal with the political complexities of their organizations, previously stressed by others authors in the field (Buchanan, 2008; Hartley, 2009).

While most management interventions in this area are currently geared towards developing political skill, my findings indicate that more attention needs to be paid to nurturing political will. Political skill is critical in managerial roles, yet it would be erroneous to assume that it can be developed like other managerial skills, given the controversial nature of organizational politics. It is unlikely that individuals would resist developing skills such as project management, yet it seems plausible that individuals will not necessarily be serene and deliberate in developing their political skill. My findings suggest that the mindset with which individuals approach politics constitutes a major obstacle in the development of political skill. Consequently, this requires practitioners to turn their attention from actual political behaviours and skills to attitudes and mindsets about politics. The dimensionality of political will proposed by this study provides a simple but powerful framework to explore managers' mindset about politics, and to address their potential concerns along what emerged as the most significant facets of political will: functional, ethical, emotional. Essentially, this means that stressing the necessity and usefulness of political engagement may not be sufficient to

make managers more willing to engage in politics. What is called for is more in-depth assistance in unearthing the ethical complexities and choices managers face when engaging in politics, as well as support in learning how to manage the emotional experience of politics. A better grasp of political will has the potential to provide insight into what exactly drives managers to make different behavioural choices when engaging in politics and what supports or obstructs the development of their political skill.

Furthermore, I believe that the notion of political maturation can demystify organizational politics for both male and female (potential) managers, by stressing the importance of learning and development in this area. The maturation model proposed flags out specific obstacles and developmental milestones which need to be considered when developing managers' political will and skill. This model suggests that certain junctions in the maturation journey are critical for some individuals and particularly for women. In addition, the model also points out two types of triggers which are essential and complementary in supporting managerial political maturation: experiential and relational learning.

Finally, the findings of the current study provide a basis for a more informed and nuanced approach to developing women managers. For instance, it is evident that supporting managers to discover ways of engaging in politics in ethical and authentic ways requires a consideration of gender. Understanding which aspects of politics are likely to motivate or to put off women, or identifying the developmental opportunities women might miss out could inform a range of concrete actions meant to help women develop a more positive relationship with politics. Examples of such steps are the careful framing of coaching related to politics in a way that resonates with women, or the purposeful mentoring of women in the political arena. If women are encouraged to develop political will, then political skill will surely follow. However, the study also calls attention to the importance of deconstructing and challenging – when necessary - the gendered practices intertwined with politics. Efforts to develop women's political competence should not merely encourage women to 'play the political game' as potentially defined in masculine terms, but should support them in developing a

mindset and approach to politics that is consistent with their values and preferences.

6.5 Limitations

As any piece of research, this study has a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged. A first concern when tackling a topic such as organizational politics is social desirability. Despite my consistent efforts to frame the research project and the interview questions in a non-judgemental way (as described in the previous chapters), I am aware that 'politics' remains a controversial, loaded term. Therefore, participants may have attempted, consciously or not, to depict their own stance and personal involvement in politics in a positive light. Several managers acknowledged upfront the negative connotation of the term 'organizational politics' and tried to go beyond it in their accounts. Others engaged in what could be described as defensive conversational rituals during the interviews, whereby they set off denying any active involvement in politics, or rejecting the label 'political'¹², and then contradicting themselves as the interview progressed. Below is an example:

So I will say I'm not a political person. I think I could be, I sometimes am. (Gina, junior manager, Bevcorp)

During the data analysis process, I tried to remain mindful of these patterns of response, yet it is hard to ascertain how much self-censure occurred during the interviews.

Furthermore, the unit of analysis in the study was the individual manager. However, the sampling was uneven due to constraints in negotiated access. Participants came from two different organizational settings and I did not have equal samples from these distinct settings. It is likely that overall, the evidence gathered from managers in Bevcorp skewed to some extent the findings of the study. In order to mitigate this, I endeavoured to provide a constant comparative analysis of the accounts provided by managers in both groups. However, I

¹² Although these labels had not been imposed upon participants in any shape or form.

inevitably had less data to draw from in the group of managers from Semcom, compared to Bevcorp. In addition, I particularly had a small number of male managers from Semcom, which may hamper the explanatory power of gender comparisons within that group.

A number of limitations and caveats must be stressed in relation to the political maturation model proposed. First, as acknowledged in the Discussion chapter, an inherent limitation of stage models is that they tend to gloss over individual differences in an effort to capture common trends. Second, this model of political maturation was developed on a managerial sample, and as such it may not be too relevant in understanding how political maturation occurs for individuals in non-managerial roles. Indeed, one of the key triggers of this maturation was managerial experience itself. Third, the stages of political maturation were partially inferred based on retrospective accounts. The design was cross-sectional, and not longitudinal, which means that I also relied on individuals' recollection to identify how their mindset and approach to politics changed. While this is not uncommon in process studies (Langley, 2009), it inevitably bears the question of selective recall.

Finally, given the methodology employed, the opportunity for empirical generalization of the findings across settings or sectors is limited. However, the aims and the claims of the study are consistent with the critical realist perspective employed, as explained in the Methodology and the Discussion chapters.

6.6 Directions for future research

The findings of the current study pave the way for exciting opportunities for future research. I would particularly stress two lines of investigation which would enrich current academic conversations in the field of organizational politics: the developmental perspective and the focus on gender.

The developmental perspective invites us to think more deeply about the nature of individual learning in the realm of politics. Methodologically, a longitudinal

study would allow a better grasp of individual patterns of development throughout the political maturation process. In addition, this thesis has demonstrated the importance of political will and the interdependence between political will and skill. This suggests that research attempting to understand how individuals deal with politics needs to broaden its scope from looking strictly at political skill, to exploring political will. This requires a more holistic grasp of the cognitive and emotional processes associated with individuals' engagement in politics. Future links with the literature on adult development could illuminate how these cognitive and emotional changes related to politics are nested into broader developmental processes associated with personal growth.

Extant literature on generic skill development could shed more light into the maturation model proposed. For instance Berliner¹³ (1986) described five stages of skill development which mark the progression from novice to expert: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert. Berliner's description of the novice captures quite well the political mindset and approach Berliner (1986) described five stages of skill development which mark the progression from novice to expert¹⁴: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert. Berliner's description of the novice captures quite well the political mindset and approach characteristic for Stage 1 of the maturation journey: 'The behaviour of the novice is rational, relatively inflexible, and tends to conform to whatever rules and procedures they were told to follow' (p. 2). In the Naiveté and Discovery stage, the 'rules to follow', from individuals' perspective, were consistent with a rational or non-political view of the workplace. As exposure to politics increased and political awareness sharpened, individuals felt increasingly ill-equipped to deal with politics and began seeking ways of positioning themselves within the political landscape. The mid-point of the maturation journey parallels Berliner's description of competent performers, which he claims, 'make choices about what they are going to do', and 'determine what is and what is not important' when enacting

¹³ While Berliner specifically examined the development of pedagogical skill, his model has been subsequently applied and developed in other areas (Brenner, 1984, on clinical nursing; Barrab and Duffy, 2000, on communities of practice).

their skill. Indeed, the reactive approach to politics which I described as typical for Stage 2 entailed sometimes deliberately resisting or challenging politics, and sometimes reluctantly or tentatively engaging in it. Berliner also noticed that while competent performers are more in control of what happens, they are not detached from enacting their skill – ‘they often feel emotional about success and failure (...) and have vivid memories of their successes and failures’ (Berliner, 1986, p. 8). Stage 2 positions and views suggested that political experiences were very emotionally charged. Finally, the end point of the maturation journey echoes the author’s description of proficient and expert behaviour. Berliner (1986, p. 10) claimed that proficient individuals gain ‘an intuitive sense of the situation’ based on ‘a holistic recognition of similarities’. In his definition, proficiency entails ease of execution, but maintains deliberateness, while expertise, the last stage of skill development, entails a ‘fluid performance’, and a non-analytic, non-deliberative approach. While I did not draw such a fine-grained distinction in my findings, there was indication that a handful of the very senior managers interviewed had achieved this fluid, effortless approach to politics, typical for Stage 3.

Furthermore, the results of this study suggested that exiting the state of political naiveté means confronting deep-seated assumptions about the rational nature of organizations. In a sense, throughout the political maturation journey, individuals appeared to shift from a rational to a political mindset about organizations. Why is it that the default image of organizations people hold is imbued with the notion of rationality? Corroborated with other research in the field of gender in management and psychology indicating that women are more concerned about competence, this study suggest that women might be more attached to the idea of organizational rationality and meritocracy. Further research needs to explore if and why this is the case and what are the consequences for women’s careers.

The findings about maturation triggers also alert us to the criticality of developmental relationships in shaping individuals’ political will and skill. It was evident that not all participants had benefited from guidance in this respect.

Participants' accounts also suggested that when it did occur, mentoring with regards to politics was useful but took fairly subtle forms, with mentors or protégés 'talking about it without naming it'. Further research needs to clarify to which extent mentors see this as part of their responsibility and how exactly they go about paving the way into politics for their protégés. Further on, with regards to role models, it is widely known that one of the enablers of role modelling is similarity (with gender being one dimension of perceived similarity). Given the dearth of women in managerial positions, the inevitable consequence is that women will have fewer examples to emulate. Interestingly, Sealy (2009) found that one of the characteristics of role models chosen by senior women in investment banks was 'being apolitical'. This is somewhat paradoxical, given that from a political perspective, success in any organization is dependent on one's ability to grasp and to navigate its political dimension. One can speculate that due to its subtle nature, and the covert nature of politics itself, political competency goes unnoticed. Future research is necessary to unpack how role models could signal political competency in a positive light, particularly for women.

Overall, I hope that by demonstrating that gender is relevant to understanding managerial political action and that politics sometimes constitute gendered practices, this study will instil greater dialogue between two bodies of research largely unrelated at the present moment: organizational politics and gender in management.

6.7 Personal learning

While this thesis presented the end product of the doctoral journey, the journey itself has been a source of tremendous learning for me. Intellectually, my horizons expanded in many ways. Being a psychologist by background, my focus was and remained the individual. However, becoming acquainted with literature in management and sociology throughout the PhD enabled me to have a better grasp of the bigger picture in which the individual operates

(organizational processes, culture, etc). I particularly enjoyed reflecting on issues of power from a macro perspective.

Further on, prior to the PhD, I only had training in quantitative research methods. While I believe that quantitative research has its own merits and purpose, I have come to appreciate the other side of the divide and scrutinize the philosophical assumptions that shaped my perception of what 'good research' should look like. I gradually discovered that despite being a messy, unpredictable and often overwhelming process, making sense of qualitative data can be extremely rewarding! I also became aware that given my previous academic training, my thinking and style of inquiry was very much geared toward a variance approach. Shifting from a snapshot view of social or individual phenomena to a dynamic, developmental perspective required a lot of effort and reading, but also paved the way to potentially more meaningful questions and answers.

Finally, in conducting the research, I felt truly privileged to speak to the 38 managers interviewed; the interest in their accounts was certainly not only an intellectual one. In many ways, those conversations became for me a source of advice and an opportunity for personal reflection around the issue of politics, which has undoubtedly shaped my own maturation journey.

REFERENCES

- Acker, J. (1990), "Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations", *Gender and Society*, vol. 4, pp. 139-158.
- Adams, E. R. and Burnett, G. W. (1991), "Scientific Vocabulary Divergence Among Primatologists Working in East Africa", *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 21, pp. 547-560.
- Ajzen, I. and Fishbein, M. (2005), "The Influence of Attitudes on Behavior", in Albarracín, D., Johnson, B. and Zanna, M. (eds.) *The Handbook of Attitudes*, Laurence Erlbaum Associates, London.
- Al-Amoudi, I. and Willmott, H. (in press), "Where Constructionism and Critical Realism Converge: Interrogating the Domain of Epistemological Relativism", *Organization Studies*, .
- Alvesson, M. (1998), "Gender Relations and Identity at Work: A Case Study of Masculinities and Femininities in an Advertising Agency", *Human Relations*, vol. 51, no. 8, pp. 969-1005.
- Alvesson, M. G. and Sandberg, J. (2011), "Generating research questions through problematization", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 247-271.
- Ammeter, A. P., Douglas, C., Gardner, W. L., Hochwarter, W. and Ferris, G. R. (2002), "Toward a political theory of leadership", *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 13, pp. 751-796.
- Archer, M., Bhaskar, R., Collier, A., Lawson, T. and Norrie, A. (eds.) (1998), *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*, Routledge, London.
- Armitage, C. J. and Conner, M. (2000), "Attitudinal Ambivalence: A test of three key hypotheses", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, , pp. 1421-1432.
- Arroba, T. and James, K. (1988), "Are Politics Palatable to Women Managers? How Women Can Make Wise Moves at Work", *Women in Management Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 123-130.
- Ashforth, B. E. and Lee, R. T. (1990), "Defensive Behavior in Organizations: A Preliminary Model", *Human Relations*, vol. 43, no. 7, pp. 621-648.
- Astley, G. W. (2005), "Socially Constructed, Administrative Science Is", in Lundberg, C. C. and Young, C. A. (eds.) *Foundations for Inquiry: Choices and Trade-Offs in the Organizational Science*, Stanford University Press, CA, pp. 110-116.

- Avolio, B. J., Gardner, L. W., Walumbwa, F. O., Luthans, F. and May, D. R. (2004), "Unlocking the mask: A look at the process by which authentic leaders impact follower attitudes and behaviors", *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 15, pp. 801-823.
- Bacharach, S. and Baratz, M. S. (1962), "Two faces of power", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 56, pp. 947-952.
- Bacharach, S. and Lawler, E. (1981), *Bargaining: Power, Tactics, and Outcomes*, Jossey-Bass.
- Bacharach, S. and Lawler, E. (1980), *Power and Politics in Organizations*, Jossey-Bass.
- Baddeley, S. and James, K. (1987), "Owl, Fox, Donkey or Sheep: Political Skills for Managers", *Management Learning*, vol. 18, pp. 3-19.
- Bandura, A. (1977), *Social learning theory*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Bazeley, P. (2007), *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo*, Sage, London.
- Berliner, D. C. *The Development of Expertise in Pedagogy*, American Association of Colleges for Teaching Education, Washington DC.
- Bhaskar, R. (1978), *A Realist Theory of Science*, Harvester Press, Hassocks.
- Biberman, G. (1985), "Personality characteristics and work attitudes of persons with high, moderate, and low political tendencies", *Psychological Reports*, vol. 57, pp. 1303-1310.
- Blaikie, N. (1993), *Approaches to social enquiry*, Polity Press, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Cambridge, UK.
- Block, P. (1987), *The empowered manager: positive political skills at work*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Borkowski, S. C. and Ugras, Y. J. (1998), "Business Students and Ethics: A Meta-Analysis", *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 17, no. 11, pp. 1117-1127.
- Boyatzis, R. (1982), *The Competent Manager: A Model of Effective Performance*, Wiley, NY.
- Buchanan, D. (2008), "You Stab My Back, I'll Stab Yours: Management Experience and Perceptions of Organization Political Behaviour", *British Journal of Management*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 49-65.
- Buchanan, D. and Badham, R. (2008), *Power, Politics, and Organizational Change: winning the turf game*, Sage, London.

- Buchanan, D. and Badham, R. (2007), *Politics, Power and Organizational Change: Winning the Turf Game*, Sage.
- Buchanan, D. and Bryman, A. (2007), "Contextualizing Methods Choice in Organizational Research", *Organizational Research Methods*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 483-501.
- Buchanan, D. and Huczynski, A. (2004), *Organizational Behaviour: An Introductory Text*, 5th Edition ed, Financial Times Prentice Hall.
- Buchanan, D. and Badham, R. (1999), "Politics and organizational change: The lived experience", *Human Relations*, vol. 52, no. 5, pp. 609.
- Buchanan, D. A. (1999), "The logic of political action: An experiment with the epistemology of the particular", *British Journal of Management*, vol. 10, pp. 73-88.
- Buchanan, D. and Badham, R. (1999), "Politics and Organizational Change: The Lived Experience", *Human Relations*, vol. 52, no. 5, pp. 609-629.
- Burr, V. (2003), *Social Constructionism*, Routledge, UK.
- Burt, R. S. (1998), "Gender and Social Capital", *Rationality and Society*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 5-46.
- Butcher, D. and Clarke, M. (2002), "Organizational politics: The cornerstone for organizational democracy", *Organizational dynamics*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 35.
- Butcher, D. and Clarke, M. (1999), "Organisational politics: the missing discipline of management?", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 9-12.
- Carli, L. L. (1999), "Gender and Social Influence", *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 57, no. 4, pp. 725-741.
- Catalyst (2004), *Women and Men in U.S. Corporate Leadership: Same Workplace, Different Realities?*, Catalyst, New York.
- Cavanagh, G. F., Moberg, D. J. and Velasquez, M. (1981), "The Ethics of Organizational Politics", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 363-374.
- Christiansen, N., Villanova, P. and Mikulay, S. (1997), "Political influence compatibility: fitting the person to the climate", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 18, no. 6, pp. 709-730.
- Clark, C. (1990), "Emotions and the micropolitics in everyday life: Some patterns and paradoxes of 'place'", in Kemper, T. D. (ed.) *Research*

agendas in the sociology of emotions, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, pp. 305-333.

Clegg, S. R. (1989), *Frameworks of Power*, Sage, London.

Collier, A. (1994), *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*, Verso, London.

Dahl, R. (1957), "Decision-making in a democracy: The supreme court as a national policy-maker", *Journal of Public Law*, vol. 6, pp. 279-295.

Danermark, B., Ekstrom, M., Jakobsen, L. and Karlsson, J. C. (2002), *Explaining Society: Critical realism in the social sciences*, Routledge, Oxon.

Davis-Blake, A. and Pfeffer, J. (1989), "Just a Mirage: The Search for Dispositional Effects in Organizational Research", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 385-400.

Dawson, P. and Buchanan, D. (2005), "The way it really happened: Competing narratives in the political process of technological change", *Human Relations*, vol. 58, no. 7, pp. 845.

Denis, J. L., Lamothe, L. and Langley, A. (2001), "The dynamics of collective leadership and strategic change in pluralistic organizations", *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 809-837.

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.

Dill, D. D. and Pearson, A. W. (1984), "The Effectiveness of Project Managers: Implications of a Political Model of Influence", *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, vol. EM31, no. 3, pp. 138-146.

Doldor, E. and Singh, V. (2008), "The Challenge of Organizational Politics: Bridging the Gap across Theoretical Domains", Anaheim, CA, USA, August 8-13.

Douglas, C. and Ammeter, A. P. (2004), "An examination of leader political skill and its effect on ratings of leader effectiveness", *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 537.

Drory, A. (1993), "Perceived political climate and job attitudes", *Organization Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 59-71.

Drory, A. and Beaty, D. (1991), "Gender Differences in the Perception of Organizational Influence Tactics", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 249-258.

- Drory, A. and Romm, T. (1990), "The Definition of Organizational Politics: A Review", *Human Relations*, vol. 43, no. 11, pp. 1133.
- DuBrin, A. J. (1974), *Fundamentals of Organizational Behavior*, Pergamon Press, Elmsford, NY.
- Dutton, J. and Dukerich, J. (1991), "Keeping an Eye on the Mirror: Image and Identity in Organizational Adaptation", *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 34, pp. 517-554.
- Eagly, A. (1987), "Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation", .
- Eagly, A. H. and Chaiken, S. (1993), "The psychology of attitudes", .
- Eagly, A. H. and Karau, S. J. (2002), "Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders", *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 109, no. 3, pp. 573-598.
- Eagly, A. H. (2005), "Achieving relational authenticity in leadership: Does gender matter?", *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 459.
- Eagly, A. H. and Carli, L. L. (2007), *Through the Labyrinth. The truth about how women become leaders*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Lowe, A. (2002), *Management Research: An Introduction*, Sage Publications, London.
- Edmondson, A. C. and McManus, S. E. (2007), "Methodological Fit in Management Field Research", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 1155-1179.
- Ely, R. J. (1995), "The power of demography: Women's social constructions of gender identity at work", *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 589.
- Ely, R. J., Foldy, E. G. and Scully, M. A. (eds.) (2003), *Reader in Gender, Work and Organization*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford UK.
- Fabrigar, L. R., MacDonald, T. and Wegener, D. T. (2005), "The structure of attitudes", in Albarracin, D., Johnson, B. and Zanna, M. (eds.) *The handbook of attitudes*, Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 79-124.
- Fandt, P. M. and Ferris, G. R. (1990), "The management of information and impressions: When employees behave opportunistically", *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, , pp. 140-158.
- Farrell, D. and Petersen, J. C. (1982), "Patterns of Political Behavior in Organization", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 403-412.

- Feldman, S. P. (1988), "Secrecy, Information, and Politics: An Essay on Organizational Decision Making", *Human Relations*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 73-90.
- Ferris, G. R., Hochwarter, W. A., Douglas, C., Blass, F. R., Kolodinsky, R. W. and Treadway, D. C. (2002), "Social influence processes in organizations and human resource systems", in Ferris, G. R. and Martocchio, J. J. (eds.) *Research in personnel and human resources management*, JAI/Elsevier Science, Oxford, pp. 65-127.
- Ferris, G. R., Treadway, D. C., Perrewe, P. L., Brouer, R. L., Douglas, C. and Lux, S. (2007), "Political skill in organizations", *Journal of Management*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 290-320.
- Ferris, G. R., Adams, G., Kolodinsky, R. W., Hochwarter, W. A. and Ammeter, A. P. (2002), "Perceptions of organizational politics: theory and research directions.", *Research in Multi-Level Issues*, vol. 1, pp. 179-254.
- Ferris, G. R., Anthony, W. P., Kolodinsky, R. W., Gilmore, D. C. and Harvey, M. G. (2002), "Development of political skill", in Wankel, C. and DeFillippi, R. (eds.) *Research in management education and development, Volume 1: Rethinking management education for the 21st century*, Information Age Publishing, Greenwich, CT., pp. 3-25.
- Ferris, G. R., Anthony, W. P., Kolodinsky, R. W., Gilmore, D. C. and Harvey, M. G. (2002), "Developing Political Skill", in Wankel, C. and DeFillippi, R. (eds.) *Rethinking management education*, Information Age Publishing, Greenwich, CT.
- Ferris, G. R., Frink, D. D., Galang, M. C., Zhou, J., Kacmar, K. M. and Howard, J. A. (1996), "Perceptions of organizational politics: Predictors, stress-related implications, and outcomes", *Human Relations*, vol. 49, pp. 233-266.
- Ferris, G. R. and Kacmar, K. M. (1992), "Perceptions of Organizational Politics", *Journal of Management*, , pp. 93-116.
- Ferris, G. R., Russ, G. S. and Fandt, P. M. (1989), "Politics in Organizations", in Giacalone, R. A. and Rosenfeld, P. (eds.) *Impressions management in the organization*, Lawrence Elrbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 143-170.
- Ferris, G. R., Treadway, D. C., Kolodinsky, R. W., Hochwarter, W. A., Kacmar, C. J., Douglas, C. and Frink, D. D. (2005), "Development and Validation of the Political Skill Inventory", *Journal of Management*, vol. 31, pp. 127-151.

- Ferris, G. R., Frink, D. D., Galang, M. C. and Zhou, J. (1996), "Perceptions of organizational politics: Prediction, stress-related implications, and outcomes", *Human Relations*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 233.
- Ferris, G. R. and King, T. R. (1991), "Politics in Human Resources Decisions: A Walk on the Dark Side", *Organizational dynamics*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 59.
- Ferris, G. R., Perrewé, P. L., Anthony, W. P. and Gilmore, D. C. (2000), "Political skill at work", *Organizational dynamics*, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 25.
- Ferris, G. R., Treadway, D. C., Kolodinsky, R. W. and Hochwarter, W. A. (2004), "Development and Validation of the Political Skill Inventory", *Journal of Management*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 126.
- Ferris, G., Davidson, S. and Perrewé, P. (2005), "Developing Political Skill at Work", *Training (New York, N.Y.)*, vol. 42, no. 11, pp. 40.
- Flick, U. (2005), "Design and process in qualitative research", in Flick, U., von Kardorff, E. and Steinke, I. (eds.) *A companion to qualitative research*, Sage, London, pp. 146-152.
- Foucault, M. (1975), *Surveiller et punir*, Gallimard.
- French, J. R. P. and Raven, B. (1959), "The bases of social power", in Cartwright, D. and Zander, A. (eds.) *Group dynamics*, Harper and Row, New York.
- Frost, P. J. and Hayes, J. L. (1979), "An exploration in two cultures of a model in political behavior in organizations", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 672-678.
- Gandz, J. and Murray, V. V. (1980), "The Experience of Workplace Politics", *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 237-251.
- Gherardi, S. (1994), "The gender we think, the gender we do in our everyday organizational lives", *Human Relations*, vol. 47, no. 6, pp. 591-611.
- Gibson, D. E. (2003), "Developing the professional self-concept: role model construals in early, middle, and late career stages", *Organization Science*, vol. 14, no. 5, pp. 591-610.
- Gilligan, C. (1982), *In a different voice*, Harvard University Press., Cambridge, MA.
- Goodman, D. J. (2011), *Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups*, Routledge, NY.

- Gotsis, G. N. and Kortezi, Z. (2010), "Ethical Considerations in Organizational Politics: Expanding the Perspective", vol. 93, pp. 497-517.
- Gray, B. and Ariss, S. S. (1985), "Politics and Strategic Change Across Organizational Life Cycles", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 707-723.
- Guadagno, R. and Cialdini, R. (2007), "Gender differences in impression management in organizations: A qualitative review.", *Sex Roles*, vol. 56, no. 7-8, pp. 483-494.
- Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994), "Competing paradigms in qualitative research", in Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research*, Sage, London, pp. 105-117.
- Hales, C. P. (1986), "What do managers do? A critical review of the evidence", *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 88-115.
- Hall, A. T., Blass, F. R., Ferris, G. R. and Massengale, R. (2004), "Leader reputation and accountability in organizations: Implications for dysfunctional leader behavior", *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 515.
- Harre, R. (1979), *The Principles of Scientific Thinking*, Macmillan, London.
- Harrell-Cook, G., Ferris, G. R. and Dulebohn, J. H. (1999), "Political behaviors as moderators of the perceptions of organizational politics--work outcomes...", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 20, no. 7, pp. 1093.
- Harris, K. J., Kacmar, K. M., Zivnuska, S. and Shaw, J. D. (2007), "The Impact of Political Skill on Impression Management Effectiveness", *The Journal of applied psychology*, vol. 92, no. 1, pp. 278-285.
- Hartley, J. "Learning the skills of leadership with political awareness: A need for more coherent development?", *International Research Symposium on Public Management*, April 2009, Copenhagen.
- Hartley, J. and Branicki, T. (2006), *Managing with Political Awareness – A summary review of the literature*, London: Chartered Management Institute.
- Hartley, J., Fletcher, C., Wilton, P., Woodman, P. and Ungemach, C. (2007), *Leading with political awareness: Developing leaders' skills to manage the political dimension across all sectors*, Institute of Governance and Public Management, UK.
- Hatch, M. J. (1997), *Organization Theory. Modern Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

- Hayes, J. (1984), "The politically competent manager", *Journal of General Management*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 24-33.
- Healy, M. and Perry, C. (2000), "Comprehensive criteria to judge validity and reliability of qualitative research within the realism paradigm", *Qualitative Market Research*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 118-126.
- Heath, C. and Sitkin, S. B. (2001), "Big-B versus big-O: What is organizational about organizational behavior", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 22, pp. 43-58.
- Heilman, M. E. (2001), "Description and prescription: How gender stereotypes prevent women's ascent up the organizational ladder", *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 57, pp. 657-674.
- Hochwarter, W. A., Ferris, G. R., Zinko, R., Arnell, B. and James, M. (2007), "Reputation as a Moderator of Political Behavior-Work Outcomes Relationships: A Two-Study Investigation With Convergent Results", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 92, no. 2, pp. 567-576.
- Hochwarter, W. A., Ferris, G. R., Gavin, M. B. and Perrewé, P. L. (2007), "Political skill as neutralizer of felt accountability-job tension effects on job performance ratings: A longitudinal investigation*", *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, vol. 102, no. 2, pp. 226.
- House, R. J., Shane, S. A. and Herold, D. M. (1996), "Rumors of the Death of Dispositional Research are Vastly Exaggerated", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 21, pp. 203-224.
- Ibarra, H. (2000), "Making Partner: A Mentor's Guide to the Psychological Journey", *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 78, no. 2, pp. 146-154.
- Ibarra, H. (1993), "Professional Networks of Women and Minorities in Management: A Conceptual Framework", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 56-87.
- Ibarra, H. (1997), "Paving an alternative route: Gender differences in managerial networks", *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 60, pp. 91-102.
- Isabella, L. A. (1990), "Evolving interpretations as change unfolds: How managers construe key organizational events", *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 7-41.
- James, K. and Arriba, T. (1990), "Politics and Management: The Effect of Stress on the Political Sensitivity of Managers", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 22-31.

- Johnson, P., Buehring, A., Cassell, C. and Symon, G. (2006), "Evaluating qualitative management research: Towards a contingent criteriology", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 131-156.
- Jones, T. M. and Gaultschi, F. H. (1988), "Will the ethics of business change? A survey of future executives", *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 7, pp. 231-248.
- Judge, T. A. and Bretz Jr., R. D. "Political Influence Behavior and Career Success", *Journal of Management*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 43-65.
- Kacmar, K. M. and Baron, R. A. (1999), "Organizational Politics: The State of the Field, Links to Related Processes, and an Agenda for Future Research", in Ferris, G. R. (ed.) *Research in Personnel and Human Resource Management*, , pp. 1-39.
- Kacmar, K. M., Bozeman, D. P., Carlson, D. S. and Anthony, W. P. (1999), "An examination of the perceptions of organizational politics model: Replication and extension", *Human Relations*, vol. 52, no. 3, pp. 383.
- Kakabadse, A. (1983), *The Politics of Management*, Gower.
- Kakabadse, A. and Parker, C. P. (eds.) (1984), *Power, Politics, and Organizations: A Behavioural Science View*, Wiley & Sons, Chichester.
- Kanter, R. (1997), *Rosabeth Moss Kanter on the Frontiers of Management*, Harvard Business School Press.
- Kanter, R. (1977), *Men and women of the corporation*, Basic Books, New York.
- King, N. (1998), "Template analysis", in Symon, G. and Cassell, C. (eds.) *Qualitative Methods and Analysis in Organizational Research*, SAGE, London.
- Kipnis, D. and Schmidt, S. M. (1988), "Upward-Influence Styles: Relationship with Performance Evaluations, Salary, and Stress", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 528-542.
- Kipnis, D., Schmidt, S. M., Swaffin-Smith, C. and Wilkinson, I. (1984), "Patterns of managerial influence: shotgun managers, tacticians, and bystanders", vol. Winter, pp. 58-67.
- Kipnis, D., Schmidt, S. M. and Wilkinson, I. (1980), "Intraorganizational Influence Tactics: Explorations in Getting One's Way", *The Journal of applied psychology*, vol. 65, no. 4, pp. 440.
- Kirchmeyer, C. (1990), "A Profile of managers Active in Office Politics", *Basic & Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 339-356.

- Knights, D. and Murray, F. (1994), *Managers Divided: Organizational Politics and Information Technology Management*, Wiley, Chichester.
- Kram, K. E. (1996), "A relational approach to career development", in Hall, D. and Associates. (eds.) *The career is dead—Long live the career*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, pp. 132-157.
- Kumar, P. and Ghadially, R. (1989), "Organizational Politics and Its Effects on Members of Organizations", *Human Relations*, vol. 42, no. 4, pp. 305-315.
- Kvale, S. (1996), *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*, SAGE.
- Langley, A. (2009), "Studying Processes in and around Organizations", in Buchanan, D. A. and Bryman, A. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Research Methods*, 1st edition, SAGE.
- Lankau, M. J. and Scandura, T. A. (2002), "An investigation of personal learning in mentoring relationships: content, antecedents, and consequences", *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 779-790.
- Lazarus, R. S. (1991), *Emotion and adaptation*, Oxford University Press, NY.
- Leary, M. R. and Kowalski, R. M. (1990), "Impression Management: A Literature Review and Two-Component Model", *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 107, no. 1, pp. 34-47.
- Lewin, K. (1936), "Principles of topological psychology", McGraw-Hill: NY
- Liu, Y., Ferris, G. R., Treadway, D. C., Prati, L. M., Perrewé, P. L. and Hochwarter, W. A. (2006), "The emotion of politics and the politics of emotion: Affective and cognitive reactions to politics as a stressor", in Vigoda, E. and Drory, A. (eds.) *Handbook of organizational politics*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton, MA, pp. 161-186.
- Liu, Y. M., Liu, J. and Wu, L. Z. (2010), "Are you willing and able? Roles of motivation, power, and politics in career growth", *Journal of Management*, vol. 36, no. 6, pp. 1432-1460.
- Liu, Y., Ferris, G. R., Zinko, R. and Perrewé, P. L. (2007), "Dispositional antecedents and outcomes of political skill in organizations: A four-study investigation with convergence", *Journal of vocational behavior*, vol. 71, no. 1, pp. 146-165.
- Lofland, J., Snow, D., Anderson, L. and Lofland, L. H. (2004), *Analysing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*, 4th edition ed, Wadsworth Publishing Company, CA.

- Lorber, J. (1994). "Night to his day: The social construction of gender", in Lorber, J. *The Paradoxes of gender*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Lukes, S. (1974), *Power: A Radical View*, Macmillian, London.
- Lundberg, C. C. and Young, C. A. (eds.) (2005), *Foundations for Inquiry: Choices and Trade-Offs in the Organizational Science*, Stanford University Press, CA.
- Lutgen-Sandvik, P. (2008), "Intensive Remedial Identity Work: Responses to Workplace Bullying Trauma and Stigmatization", *Organization*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 97-119.
- Luthans, F. (1988), "Successful versus effective real managers", *Academy of Management Executive*, vol. 2, pp. 127-132.
- Lyness, K. S. and Thompson, D. E. (2000), "Climbing the corporate ladder: Do female and male executives follow the same route?", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 85, pp. 86-101.
- Mackenzie Davey, K. (2008), "Women's Accounts of Organizational Politics as a Gendering Process", *Gender, Work and Organization*, vol. 15, no. 6, pp. 650-671.
- Madison, D. L., Allen, R. W., Porter, L. W., Renwick, P. A. and Mayes, B. T. (1980), "Organizational Politics: An Exploration of Managers' Perceptions", *Human Relations*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 79.
- Mainiero, L. A. (1994), "On breaking the glass ceiling: The political seasoning of powerful women executives", *Organizational dynamics*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 4-20.
- Mangham, I. (1979), "The Politics of Organizational Change", Wesport, CT.
- Mann, S. (1995), "Politics and power in organizations: Why women lose out", *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 9-15.
- Marshall, J. (1984), *Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World*, John Wiley and Sons Ltd, Chichester.
- Mayes, B. T. and Allen, R. W. (1977), "Toward A Definition of Organizational Politics", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 672-678.
- McGrath, J. E. (ed.) (1988), *The Social Psychology of Time: New Perspectives*, SAGE Publishing ed, Newbury Park, CA.

- Miles, M. B. and Huberman, A. M. (1994), *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*, 2nd edition ed, SAGE Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Miller, B. K., Rutherford, M. A. and Kolodinsky, R. W. (2008), "Perceptions of organizational politics: A meta-analysis of outcomes", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, vol. 22, pp. 209-222.
- Mintzberg, H. (1990), "The manager's job: Folklore and fact", *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 68, no. 2, pp. 163-176.
- Mintzberg, H. (1985), "The Organization as Political Arena", *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 134-154.
- Mintzberg, H. (1983), *Power in and Around Organizations*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey.
- Morgan, G. and Smircich, L. (1980), "The Case for Qualitative Research", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 491-500.
- Neuman, W. L. (2006), *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Pearson Education, MA.
- New, C. (2004), "Sex and Gender: A Critical Realist Approach", *Annual Conference of the International Association for Critical Realism*, Cambridge, UK.
- Novelli, L., Jr, Flynn, W. R. and Elloy, D. F. (1994), "Perceptions of organizational policies in an autonomous work team organization", *International Journal of Management*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 648.
- Oppenheim, A. N. (2001), *Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement*, 2nd edition ed, Continuum.
- Parker, C. P., Dipboye, R. L. and Jackson, S. L. (1995), "Perceptions of Organizational Politics: An Investigation of Antecedents and Consequences", *Journal of Management*, vol. 21, no. 5, pp. 891-912.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002), *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, Sage, CA.
- Perrewe, P. L., Ferris, G. R., Frink, D. D. and Anthony, W. P. (2000), "Political skill: An antidote for workplace stressors", *The Academy of Management Executive*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 115.
- Perrewe, P. L. and Nelson, D. L. (2004), "Gender and Career Success: The Facilitative Role of Political Skill", *Organizational dynamics*, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 366-378.

- Perrewe, P. L., Zellars, K. L., Ferris, G. R. and Rossi, A. M. (2004), "Neutralizing Job Stressors: Political Skill as an Antidote to the Dysfunctional Consequences of Role Conflict", *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 141.
- Peterson, R. A., Beltramini, R. F. and Kozmetsky, G. "Concerns of college students regarding business ethics: A replication", *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 10, no. 10, pp. 733-738.
- Pettigrew, A. (1973), *The politics of organizational decision-making*, Tavistock, London.
- Pettigrew, A. and McNulty, T. (1995), "Power and influence in and around the boardroom", *Human Relations*, vol. 48, no. 8, pp. 845.
- Pfeffer, J. (1992), "Understanding Power in Organizations", *California management review*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 29.
- Pfeffer, J. (1981), *Power in Organizations*, Pitman Publishing, Massfield, Mass.
- Plowman, D. A., Baker, L. T., Beck, T. E., Kulkarni, M., Solansky, S. T. and Travis, D. V. (2007), "Radical change accidentally: The emergence and amplification of small change", *The Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 515-543.
- Porter, L. W., Allen, R. W. and Angle, H. L. (1981), "The Politics of Upward Influence in Organizations", *Research in Organizational Behavior*, vol. 3, pp. 109-149.
- Powell, G. N. (1999), "Handbook of Gender and Work", Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Prasad, L. and Rubenstein, A. H. (1992), "Conceptualizing Organizational Politics as a Multidimensional Phenomenon: Empirical Evidence from a Study of Technological Innovations", *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 4.
- Pratt, M. G., Rockman, K. W. and Kaufman, J. B. (2006), "Constructing professional identity: The role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents", *Academy of Management Conference*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 235-262.
- Provis, C. (2006), "Organizational politics, definitions and ethics", in Vigoda-Godat, E. and Drory, A. (eds.) *Handbook of Organizational Politics*, Edward edgar Publishing, Northampton, MA, pp. 89-106.
- Ragins, B. R. and Sundstrom, E. (1989), "Gender and Power in Organizations: A Longitudinal Perspective", *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 105, pp. 51-88.

- Ralston, D. A., Giacalone, R. A. and Terpstra, R. H. (1994), "Ethical perceptions of organizational politics: A comparative evaluation of American and Hong Kong managers", *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 13, no. 12, pp. 989-999.
- Reed, M. I. (2009), "Critical Realism: Philosophy, Method, or Philosophy is Search of a Method?", in Buchanan, D. and Bryman, A. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Research Methods*, 1st ed, Sage, London, pp. 430-448.
- Riley, P. (1983), "A Structurationist Account of Political Culture", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 414-437.
- Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (eds.) (2003), *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, Sage, London.
- Rosen, C. C., Harris, K. J. and Kacmar, K. M. (2009), "The emotional implications of organizational politics: A process model", *Human Relations*, vol. 62, no. 1, pp. 27-57.
- Sayer, A. (2000), *Realism and Social Science*, Sage, London.
- Schein, V. A. (2001), "A global look at psychological barriers to women's progress in management", *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 57, pp. 675-688.
- Schein, V. A. and Mueller, R. (1992), "Sex role stereotypings and requisite management characteristics: A cross cultural look.", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 13, pp. 439-447.
- Schein, V. E. (1977), "Individual Power and Political Behaviors in Organization - an Inadequately Explored Reality", *Academy of Management. The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 64.
- Schein, V. E. (1973), "The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 57, pp. 95-100.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2003), "Three Epistemological Stances for Qualitative Inquiry: Interpretivism, Hermeneutics, and Social Constructionism", in Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 292-331.
- Sealy, R., Doldor, E. and Vinnicombe, S. (2009). *Increasing diversity on public and private sector boards*, Government Equalities Office, UK
- Sealy, R. (2009), *A qualitative examination of the importance of female role models in investment banks* (PhD Thesis), Cranfield School of Management, UK.

- Semadar, A., Robins, G. and Ferris, G. R. (2006), "Comparing the validity of multiple social effectiveness constructs in the prediction of managerial job performance", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 443-461.
- Shapiro, E. C., Haseltine, F. P. and Rowe, M. P. (1978), "Moving up: role models, mentors, and the "patron system"", *Sloan Management Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 51.
- Silverman, D. (2006), *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 3rd edition ed, SAGE.
- Simon, H. (1957), "A Behavioral Model of Rational Choice", in *Models of Man, Social and Rational: Mathematical Essays on Rational Human Behavior in a Social Setting*, New York: Wiley, .
- Simpson, R. and Lewis, P. (2005), "An Investigation of Silence and a Scrutiny of Transparency: Re-examining Gender in Organization Literature Through the Concepts of Voice and Visibility", *Human Relations*, vol. 58, no. 10, pp. 1253-1275.
- Singh, V., Kumra, S. and Vinnicombe, S. (2002), "Gender and Impression Management: Playing the Promotion Game", *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 37, pp. 77-89.
- Snyder, M. (1987), *Public appearances/private realities*, W. H. Freeman, NY.
- Spiggle, S. (1994), "Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research", *The Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 491-503.
- Stepanski, K., Kershaw, T. S. and Arkakelian, A. (2000), "Perceptions of Work Politics: Meta-analytic investigation of individual differences and outcome variables", *Fifteenth Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, New Orleans, .
- Sussman, L., Adams, A. J., Kuzmits, F. E. and Raho, L. E. (2002), "Organizational politics: Tactics, channels, and hierarchical roles", *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 313-329.
- Tedeschi, J. T. and Melburg, V. (1984), "Impression management and influence in the organization", *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, vol. 3, pp. 31-58.
- Treadway, D. C., Ferris, G. R., Duke, A. B., Adams, G. L. and Thatcher, J. B. (2007), "The moderating role of subordinate political skill on supervisors' impressions of subordinate ingratiation and ratings of subordinate interpersonal facilitation", *The Journal of applied psychology*, vol. 92, no. 3, pp. 848.

- Treadway, D. C., Ferris, G. R., Hochwarter, W., Perrewé, P., Witt, L. A. and Goodman, J. M. (2005), "The Role of Age in the Perceptions of Politics -- Job Performance Relationship: A Three-Study Constructive Replication", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 90, no. 5, pp. 872-881.
- Treadway, D. C., Hochwarter, W. A., Ferris, G. R. and Kacmar, C. J. (2004), "Leader political skill and employee reactions", *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 493-513.
- Treadway, D. C., Hochwarter, W. A., Ferris, G. R., Kacmar, C. J., Douglas, C., Ammeter, A. P. and Buckley, M. R. (2004), "Leader political skill and employee reactions", *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 493-513.
- Treadway, D. C., Hochwarter, W. A., Kacmar, C. J. and Ferris, G. R. (2005), "Political will, political skill, and political behavior", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 229-245.
- Tsang, E. W. K. and Kwan, K. M. (1999), "Replication and Theory Development in Organizational Science: A Critical Realist Perspective", *The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 759-780.
- Valle, M. and Perrewé, P. L. (2000), "Do politics perceptions relate to political behaviors? Tests of an implicit assumption and expanded model", *Human Relations*, vol. 53, no. 3, pp. 359.
- Van de Ven, A. H. (2007), *Engaged Scholarship: A Guide for Organizational and Social Research*, Oxford University Press, NY.
- Van de Ven, A. H. (1992), "Suggestions for studying strategy process: a research note", *Strategic Management Journal*, vol. 13, pp. 169-188.
- Vecchio, R. P. and Sussmann, M. (1991), "Choice of Influence Tactics: Individual and Organizational Determinants", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 73.
- Velasquez, M., Moberg, D. J. and Cavanagh, G. F. (1983), "Organizational Statesmanship and Dirty Politics: Ethical Guidelines for the Organizational Politician", *Organizational dynamics*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 65.
- Vigoda, E. (2002), "Stress-related aftermaths to workplace politics: The relationships among politics, job distress, and aggressive behavior in organizations", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 571.
- Vigoda, E. (2001), "Reactions to organizational politics: A cross-cultural examination in Israel and Britain", *Human Relations*, vol. 54, no. 11, pp. 1483-1518.

- Vigoda, E. and Cohen, A. (2002), "Influence tactics and perceptions of organizational politics: A longitudinal study", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 55, no. 4, pp. 311-324.
- Vigoda-Gadot, E. (2003), *Developments in organizational politics: how political dynamics affect employee performance in modern work sites*, Cheltenham, UK ; Northampton, MA, USA : E. Elgar.
- von, B., C. L., Shirk, D. K. and Zanna, M. P. (1981), "Impression management in the job interview: when the female applicant meets the male (chauvinist) interviewer", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, , pp. 45-51.
- Vredenburg, D. J. and Maurer, J. G. (1984), "A Process Framework of Organizational Politics", *Human Relations*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 47-66.
- Weiss, H. M. and Adler, S. (1984), "Personality and organizational behavior", in Staw, B. M. and Cummings, L. L. (eds.) *Research in organizational behavior*, , pp. 1-50.
- Weiss, H. M. and Cropanzano, R. (1996), "Affective events theory: A theoretical discussion of the structure, causes and consequences of affective experiences at work", in Staw, B. M. and Cummings, L. L. (eds.) *Research in organizational behavior*, JAI, Greenwich, CT, pp. 1-74.
- Werhane, P. H. (1999), *Moral imagination and management decision-making*, Oxford University Press, NY.
- West, C. and Zimmerman, D. H. (1987), "Doing Gender", *Gender and Society*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 125-151.
- Wharton, A. S. and Erickson, R. J. (1993), "Managing emotions on the job and at home: Understanding the Consequences of Multiple Emotional Roles", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 18, pp. 457-486.
- Whetten, D. A., Felin, T. and King, B. G. (2009), "The Practice of Theory Borrowing in Organizational Studies: Current Issues and Future Directions", *Journal of Management*, vol. 35, no. 3, pp. 537-563.
- White, B., Cox, C. and Cooper, C. L. (1997), "A portrait of successful women", *Women In Management Review*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 27-34.
- Witt, L. A. (1998), "Enhancing organizational goal congruence: A solution to organizational politics", *The Journal of applied psychology*, vol. 83, no. 4, pp. 666.
- Yoder, J.D. (1991). "Rethinking tokenism: Looking beyond numbers". *Gender & Society*, vol. 5, pp. 178-192.

- Yukl, G. and Falbe, G. M. (1991), "Importance of different power sources in downward and lateral relations", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 76, pp. 416-423.
- Yukl, G. and Tracey, J. B. (1992), "Consequences of influence tactics used with subordinates, peers, and the boss", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 77, pp. 525-535.
- Zahra, S. A. (1989), "Executive Values And The Ethics Of Company Politics: Some P", *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 15-29.
- Zahra, S. A. (1987), "Organizational Politics and the Strategic Process", *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 6, no. 7, pp. 579-587.
- Zahra, S. A. (1985), "Background and Work Experience Correlates of the Ethics and Effect of Organizational Politics", *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 4, no. 5, pp. 419-423.
- Zaleznik, A. (1970), "Power and Politics in Organizational Life", *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 48, pp. 47-60.
- Zanzi, A., Arthur, M. B. and Shamir, B. (1991), "The Relationships Between Career Concerns and Political Tactics in Organizations", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 219-233.
- Zanzi, A. and O'Neill, R. M. (2001), "Sanctioned Versus Non-sanctioned Political Tactics", *Journal of Managerial Issues*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 245-263.
- Zivnuska, S., Kacmar, K. M., Witt, L. A., Carlson, D. S. and Bratton, V. K. (2004), "Interactive effects of impression management and organizational politics on job performance", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 25, no. 5, pp. 627-640.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Interview protocol

Below I provide the main questions used during the interviews, as well as examples of probing questions. This protocol was used flexibly.

1. Please describe your role and responsibilities within the company.
2. What do you think about when I say 'organizational politics'? Examples.
3. How would you describe the organizational culture here and how does it shape politics?
 - a. What are 'political issues' in the workplace?
4. How would you describe your attitude towards politics?
5. Has your attitude/view on politics changed over time?
 - a. How do you see it differently now, compared to a few years ago?
 - b. What prompted the change?
6. How do you react when faced with politics? How do you handle politics?
7. What matters to you when engaging in/handling politics?
 - a. What is a 'good' way of handling politics in your view?
8. Has your ability to engage in politics changed over time?
 - a. What do you do better now, compared to a few years ago?
 - b. What prompted the change?
9. Were there other learning factors that shaped your view of organizational politics and the way you engage in it?
10. What do you wish you had known about politics at an earlier stage of your career?
 - a. What lessons have you learnt?
 - b. What advice would you give to a more junior person?
11. Do you think there are differences in how individuals handle politics, in terms of gender or seniority?
12. Comments, questions.

Appendix B – Dissemination of doctoral research

Doldor, E., Anderson, D. and Vinnicombe, S. (2011). 'Refining the Concept of Political Will: A Gender Perspective', *British Journal of Management* (accepted)

Doldor, E. (2009). 'Managerial Attitudes toward Organizational Politics'. *British Academy of Management*, Brighton, UK

Doldor, E. and Singh, V. (2008). 'The Challenge of Organizational Politics: Bridging the Gap across Theoretical Domains'. *Academy of Management Conference*, Anaheim, CA, USA

Doldor, E. (2008). 'Power and Politics: Why Gender Makes a Difference', MBA course (invited speaker), *Kellogg School of Management*, USA

Doldor, E. and Singh, V. (2007). 'Individual meanings and attitudes towards political behaviours amongst female managers: An exploratory study'. *European Doctoral Research Conference*, Imperial College, London, UK

Doldor, E. and Singh, V. (2007). 'Being political, being (in)visible: women's political behaviours in organizations and the masculine construal of corporate power', *5th Interdisciplinary Conference of Gender, Work and Organization*, Keele, UK

